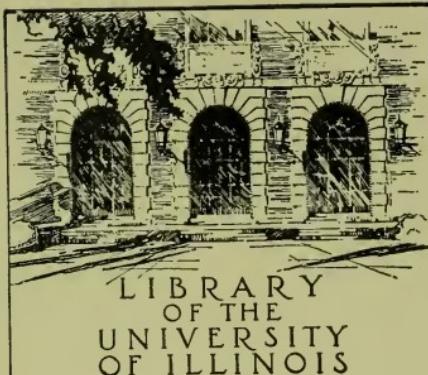


*A
VAGABOND
IN ARTS*

ALGERNON CISSING



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A VAGABOND IN ARTS

BY

ALGERNON GISSING

AUTHOR OF

A MOORLAND IDYL,⁷ 'A VILLAGE HAMPDEN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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A VAGABOND IN ARTS.

CHAPTER I.

TWO GENERATIONS.

'WHOLLY preposterous, Shiel! I think father was entirely right, and you egregiously—ridiculously wrong,' exclaimed Ebba, throwing down the book she had been reading, so as to face her brother undividedly in giving her answer to his peremptory question.

The youth glanced surprise, then abrupt displeasure.

‘ You do ?’ was, however, all he could, for the moment, discharge at her.

‘ Certainly I do,’ continued the sister, with unflinching steadiness, stayed in part apparently by just the slightest shaft of disdain. ‘ Your position is perhaps the most ignominious one open to a person laying any claim to the title of civilised being——’

‘ Have I ever laid claim to such a—such a despicable denomination ?’ he demanded, vehemently. ‘ Are you a hypocrite, Abb, or a traitor—which ?’

‘ I hope neither.’

‘ One of them you must be. A week ago you agreed with me in this. Are you——’

‘ In what ?’ asked Ebba, composedly.

‘ In my attitude to things. Have I not

grown to it with you ? Have we not carved our way shoulder to shoulder through these huge snowdrifts which have settled upon humanity—this earthly freight, this custom which lies upon us with a weight heavy as frost, deep almost—nay, deeper far than life, such as we have made it ? Haven't we, Ebba ? Were you not the first to show the way to me ? Dare you not now breathe the atmosphere that we have reached ? It is too strong for you. You must prove yourself a woman, after all.'

' Not less, I hope, at any rate,' replied the girl, haughtily. ' But stay, Shiel.'

' Well ?'

He turned back, frowning impatiently.

' Supposing I admit the whole of the imputation, I can't see how that affects the

issue. You are surely not unreasonable enough to reflect back upon an innocent party what is at most an idiosyncrasy of my own or yours? Even from the atmosphere that you are breathing, you must surely admit the purely speculative nature of your impressions——'

‘Idiosyncrasy—speculation! These are your words now, Abb! Isn’t it as plain as Tam Tallon’s Crag yonder, that my impressions are received from the irresistible—the universal truth only? Show me, by the very sorriest shred of evidence, that I asked, or had the remotest wish, to be sent into this world, and I will instantly admit my responsibility, and plunge into any trade or calling that you or father may like to dictate to me. Until you can produce such evidence, I decline to accept one

particle of responsibility for or in my existence here.'

'—And to live in a state of grossly selfish indolence——'

'Traitor again!' roared he. 'You cannot be idle or selfish if you are absolutely without responsibility. You have asserted this to me yourself, Abb, times without number.'

'Certainly, with regard to dependent responsibility,' asserted the maiden with calm vigour and dignity; 'that arising from direct action of one's own. But to disclaim a responsibility imposed by the sheer nature of things—well, well, what at least seemed to our father to be the nature of things in his happier philosophy—is in the last degree ignoble. If we, out of superior wisdom, excogitate a

wholly different nature of things, it surely dates from our moment only, and can but be of future application. Even in positive life are not *ex post facto* laws considered the height of iniquity? How much more so in matters of spec—of reflection then!'

'I cannot draw such casuistical distinctions,' said Shiel, curling his youthfully-fringed lip majestically.

'But, Shiel, look at the baldest facts of the case,' pursued Ebba, in a softer, more conciliatory tone. 'Can our father support us to the end of time upon his three hundred a-year?'

'Is it my fault if he cannot?'

'Look what a cruel burden you impose upon him.'

'Cruel—humbug! You talk as the

Pharisees, Ebba. Until this moment you have invariably seen that he has laid the burden upon us.'

'*Ex post facto* again, Shiel,' she remarked, placidly. 'To us, as regards any to come after us, it may seem so; but did it to our father? You are perfectly well aware that, at the time of father's marriage, he thought it a heaven-born duty to enter into that estate, and by God's blessing to multiply souls for the full enjoyment of this glorious universe.'

Shiel glanced quickly at his sister, but she was immovable. Her large dark eyes rested upon him in serenity.

'And am I to sustain the fatuity?' growled the youth, sullenly.

'In your own self I expect not; but as

regards *him*, most undoubtedly you are.
It is your clear duty——'

'How often shall I tell you, Abb, that without responsibility there can be no such thing as duty?' he hurled fiercely out at her.

'Then it ought to be your pleasure,' she returned, emphatically; 'it ought to be your pleasure to lighten his life by *your* labour. I have never supposed that you would mould responsibilities on your own account; but existing ones you cannot in honour repudiate. Some work you must select, if only out of regard for father. Only with his death can your freedom from responsibility commence, and your——'

'Monstrous!' cried Shiel in real anger.
'Just like a woman! Once in face of a

logical issue and you become a treacherous, a paltry casuist.'

And therewith he turned, and the door slammed noisily after him.

Ebba linked her hands behind her, and walked slowly to the window. She saw her brother bound into the garden, trot lightly down the path, and at one prodigious leap clear the five-barred gate which ended it. A smile flitted across her expressive features, and she muttered something. Her brother's figure was no longer visible, but her eyes were not yet withdrawn from the outward prospect.

The view from this Linnbrig vicarage was not extensive, nor was it commanding enough to earn the epithet grand. It was as impressive certainly as your spirit was inclined to make it, for, pitched near the

head of a singularly desolate valley in the heart of northern moors, it was limited, at a distance of scarce a bowshot, by steep and frowning hills of irregularly conical shape which, shoulder to shoulder, asserted each a prominent individuality, and stood there but as the vanguard of leagues of similar ranks behind. The head waters of the Linnburn tumbled along the bottom, and, except when its murmur was drowned by the deafening anger of the wind, no sound disturbed its territories beyond the note of a shy moorland bird, the voice of a climbing sheep, or the cracked despairing bell of the little solitary church. The sun frequently shone here, illumining the green slopes studded with golden knobs of gorse, betraying the purple clumps of heath sprinkled amidst

the bent, and causing the grey limbs of the battered birks which marked the crease of the burn in the hill-side to glisten in the breeze; but its more characteristic aspect was after all the sunless grey. Under that only could the scene do full justice to itself, and reveal the subtle depth of its peculiar genius. Like its brother in art, our maligned misinterpreted November, its genius lay not in the superficial geniality of an ever-smiling complacency. Like him, if chary of smiles, it could smile, or even laugh, with the merriest, but never with such heedless unphilosophical abandonment as to lead you to forget that there was aye an ‘o'er-word to the sang.’

As Ebba now regarded the scene, it lay betwixt tears and smiling. The win-

ter snows had finally vanished from such hills as were visible from the window,—although lingering on some greater heights behind,—but scarcely warmer hues had as yet replaced them. The sunshine was weak and fitful, lighting up the valley but momentarily, as now, in its flight before the scudding columns of blinding sleet which rushed on enveloping the mountains. With her proud appreciative smile the girl watched the gradual transformation. The patch of clear blue was vanishing from the zenith, encroached upon by the fringed storm-cloud, which leaning from heaven to earth advanced in extinguishing progress. As it came striding down the slopes, one familiar object after another disappeared: the sheep, with fleeces ruffled by the wind and faces

lowered, were seen trudging to the bushes or the crags, but faded on the way ; the last fir-tree was hidden ; birch after birch went out. As the sun left the ruddy alder clump below, it encountered another object almost familiar as these. Ebba's glance too had caught it, and there her eye remained. It stood, but its shadow moved around it : then, as it seemed, with a flourish of an arm, figure and shadow were caught into the cloud, and the sunlight sped onwards.

It was just as the last of the scene—the gate, the garden, the nearest flower-bed—had disappeared, and the rain and hail dashed in a boisterous swirl against the windows, that Ebba turned, aware of another sound within the room.

‘ Abb, will you come ?’

‘Yes, father.’

And with alacrity the girl followed her father to the library.

There was no sort of restraint on the daughter’s part, but the gentleman, as it seemed, was by no means at his ease. As Ebba drew up an old stool, with four black carved feet and a crimson cushion, close to the fender, Mr. Wanless trifled with a fossil on the mantel-piece. The storm beat musically upon the panes.

‘You are troubled about Shiel, father?’ suggested the girl, looking up from her crouching posture with her chin resting in the hollow of one hand.

‘Troubled! I am dazed, stupefied,’ said he, without altering his position. ‘What on earth is his meaning?’

‘ What did he say to you ? ’ asked Ebba, cautiously.

‘ That he has no intention of earning a livelihood.’

The words, the tone and the clergyman’s rueful countenance struck Ebba as irresistibly ludicrous, and laughing she asked,

‘ Didn’t he say present intention, father ? ’

‘ I don’t recollect the word present,’ returned he impatiently ; ‘ but surely, Ebba, this is no laughing matter. Shiel would hardly make fun of me,—moreover he—’

‘ No, forgive me, dear father. It is not a laughing matter, but, you know, tragedies are often irresistibly comic.

He is not making fun of you. He is quite in earnest, and in his present mood I am convinced that nothing will persuade him to submit to a wage-earning existence.'

'Mood, Abb? But the question of one's existence is hardly to be approached as a matter of mood. In what mood will he starve, do you suppose?'

'In an heroic one, I do not doubt,' replied Ebba, readily.

The clergyman again deprecated any approach to levity in the discussion.

'I am far from intending it, father. But you have hardly expected that Shiel was to be drafted off like any mere ordinary individual?' the girl again looked up as she put the question.

'I have had no wish to draft him off,

and certainly the proposal I have been able to make to him is very far from ordinary. He has always been an odd boy, I admit, and no doubt I never properly understood him; but, Nabbs,' continued the father, looking down and touching her head affectionately, ' he is no longer a boy, unless your new-fangled notions allow such subterfuge to a fellow of twenty-two, and a graduate of Oxford. I had thought modern tendencies lay in a somewhat different direction.'

' He is not a boy assuredly.'

' I could have understood it if his disposition had been different,' pursued the perplexed father, ' if he had been weak, indolent, dissipated, or——, but he is none of these. I have had most admirable reports of him, and indeed his successes

and his conduct here speak for themselves. And such an offer. He told you, of course.'

'Not definitely,' replied Ebba, not wishing to hurt her father by Shiel's own characterization of the offer, 'a sublimated species of pedagogy,' to wit.

'It is a tutorship to Lord Purbeck's son, with a salary of two hundred pounds a year. Two hundred a year!' repeated the clergyman, energetically. 'Nearly as much as I can lay claim to, after a lifetime's effort. Think of it, Ebba. Is it to be sacrificed?'

'I am afraid it will have to be,' replied the girl, with calm philosophy.

'It will not have to be,' exclaimed the other, with unprecedented warmth. 'It cannot, and shall not be. If the boy does

not know what is for his own benefit, it is my place to teach it him, and--and, I will do my duty. You, Ebba, I shall expect to help me. I have been working for this for years, and are all my efforts to be flung away? Impossible!'

Ebba looked into the fire. The shower without had passed, and the sun was out again, so all was still. This agitation of her father had taken the girl wholly by surprise. That the man had some inward fund of firmness and resolve she could not doubt, judging merely from the character of herself and brother; but hitherto it had never appeared in any practical management of his children. She was not engaged with the merely ignoble consideration of a contest between ill-matched powers; she only felt a human sympathy

with her father in his inevitable disquiet.

‘ I require your promise, Abb, to help me. You have the greatest influence with him.’

‘ Did he give any reason for his decision ?’ asked Ebba.

‘ Reason ! How could he ?’ cried the clergyman, with sarcasm. ‘ He is not deficient in intellect, Ebba, whatever else he may be lacking. He vouchsafed no explanation. I had to be content with a dogged, savage negative. Can you enlighten me ?’

The young lady, of course, could not. She was sufficiently thankful that some measure of self-restraint was possible to her brother.

‘ You have said, father, that I have the greatest influence over Shiel ; that means,

I suppose, that you think I can understand him best. If this is so, will you forgive me if I ask you to act by my direction ?'

' If it is to compass my end,' replied he.

' For the present it is not to be compassed ; I beseech you to believe that. You know enough of Shiel's nature——'

' Ebba, it must be compassed. This offer must not be lost. The efforts--nay, the humiliation I have undergone to bring Shiel to his present position ; do they count for nothing ? You at least will admit that I have had no selfish aim in pursuing such an object. I thought that he would recognise my efforts, instead of——Has he any alternative to offer ? You know I am

not unreasonable. Of course, if he has any definite preferences, I should be the last to thwart them. All I could get from him was a savage repudiation of all employment. Surely I am under some gross misapprehension ?'

' I am afraid you are not, father. I believe Shiel does at present savagely repudiate all species of remunerative employment. You are perfectly right in that. But humiliation, father,—you said humiliation ? *You* had undergone ?'

' I did, Ebba,' returned the other, with undiminished agitation, ' and I repeat it. Can a man undergo viler than in —in borrowing a thousand pounds ? Can he, I say ?'

The girl was enlightened, but she be-

trayed no symptom of surprise, if indeed she felt it.

'It is vile,' she said, quietly. 'It is vile.'

'Do not misunderstand me, Ebba!' he cried, with a revulsion of feeling wrought of her instant sympathy. 'I grudge the boy nothing. It was a clear enough duty in such a case. But you see my position. Without indulging such baseness as to impute it to him for a debt, not unnaturally I thought that the opportunities which it would buy for him would enable him with ease, and as I even thought with pleasure, to give me some little assistance in repaying it. You will not be surprised, then, at his behaviour having appalled me. On his account, mind. Bless me, if

he was well provided for, you and I could find no difficulty in saving this amount in a few years ourselves, if we *had* to do it; but for it to be all frustrated !'

' You did not tell Shiel of this ?' said Ebba, starting up with her first display of anxiety.

' Of course not, dear girl. But I am undecided as to whether it is not my duty to do so. It might certainly have weight with him, and anything that would——'

' Promise me, father, that you will not,' exclaimed the girl, with real solemnity. ' Anything but that. He must not know that. I know him, father, and be assured that I am right in this. It would be disastrous.'

The father eyed his daughter curiously. He was not given to confidential inter-

course with his children. The expression of her features struck him deeply, and he felt in the humiliating position of being subject to the judgment of a girl perhaps one-third his age. He a man of middle life and a clergyman.

‘ You promise this, dear father?’

‘ I must do, Abb, for the present, at any rate, since you beg it so seriously. If you also promise to exert your influence over Shiel.’

‘ That I shall certainly do; but I must tell you openly that as regards this first offer, at any rate, I shall not be successful. I should mislead you, father, if I suggested the slightest hope otherwise.’

‘ Don’t say that, Abb. I have shown you how deeply I feel upon the subject. I know you will do your duty. Come to

me here at this same hour to-morrow morning,' he said, placing his finger upon the face of the clock.

The vicar sat to his table, and Ebba left the room.

Some such issue as this had, of course, not been unforeseen by the young lady, since the youthful speculation upon which it was founded had, truly to her brother's imputation, been shared by both of them. The only difference was that Ebba could indulge in any excess of intellectual vagary from its mere interest in the abstract, whilst such experience in Shiel became an irresistible conviction, upon which a definite world's action had to be based. If it stopped short of this, what was the value of it to its holder? or what was the guarantee of his sincerity?

As Ebba pondered the topic in her own room, dallying with her pencil (for she had an artistic turn), she became unusually grave. Nobody knew her brother as she did, that she could with safety assume, but in this issue the knowledge brought her little confidence. Had she known him less, she would have proceeded the more buoyantly.

CHAPTER II.

HANDSEL.

SHIEL WANLESS undoubtedly appeared a fine fellow as he trotted down the garden-path and cleared the five-barred gate beyond. In his mere stature there was nothing extraordinary, for, as had but just been shown, his sister's eyes were fully on a level with his throat, and Ebba in physical development was not a giantess. But there was a graceful vigour of build about the man which could never escape

immediate recognition. Looking at his movements from the back, he might have been pronounced a model athlete, in whom lay no suggestion of development exceeding the needs of the perfected human frame. No excessive muscular bulge about the calves of the stockings, (he was wearing knickerbockers,)—no sinewy ropes to flank the throat, which in a loose white flannel collared shirt was open to the breeze,—no Herculean hands and wrists: graceful, vigorous all, suggestive of elastic heaven-born health rather than excessive, unnatural endeavour. Whatever he did, was obviously done instinctively and with ease.

True, as he now bounded over fences, spanned the sunlit pasture, and leapt the burn boiling in its rocky bed, there was

an appearance of reckless exertion hardly at one with this allusion to instinctive ease. But the occasion was exceptional. He was deeply moved, and, as the time had gone by when he gave vent to fits of passion by means of bullets and a stable-door, the emotion had to find deliverance in some other less purposeful manner: as it seemed now, indeed, by way of mere kicking up of heels, or pawing the turf, like any other infuriated animal.

He confronted the slope with no diminution of energy, sniffing the aromatic breath of the bog-myrtle which he bruised beneath his feet, and yelling an expletive if his foot missed the solid hassock which his instinct knew so well. Here he startled an angry grouse, there a swiftly darting snipe which glistened in the sun. Now

his thudding foot aroused the sheep, and, looking up in quick alarm, they rushed into a flock, all tails and flanks bobbing up in ungainly flight. But once away, and no resonant bark ensuing, all in an instant wheeled, and, with their white comely faces erect, the whole regiment cast an inquiring glance upon the intruder and the sun together.

This first brought Shiel to pause, and as though the brief scrutiny of those placid features had suddenly imparted some degree of composure to himself, he proceeded more leisurely thereafter.

It was now, in his calmer advance, that he first caught sight of the approaching storm. The sunlight was still about him, and as he looked up at the dimly looming heights, the expression of his face under-

went still another change. This remarkable flexibility of feature was one of Shiel's noticeable attributes, and it may in some measure have been the result of a life spent in most part in the society of his own uncontrolled thoughts. What in others might have passed as a casual remark to a companion, (or, in most, might never have occurred at all,) took in this silent ungregarious animal, the form of a self-communing facial expression. Hence his features had gained what his tongue had lost in the power or the habit of emotional utterance. This latest aspect seemed one of simple, let us say physical elation : anger had gone ; the mild momentary flash of spiritual sensibility had followed it ; now, in the face of the rolling cloud, the lips closed and the eyelids quivered in

the intensity of defiant ecstasy. He paused again : the increasing wind came rushing around him, flinging the first drops against his cheeks which the sun illumined, and making his loose jacket swell and flap like an unfurling sail. This he caught together and buttoned ; he strained his cap over his ears and forehead ; and then stood like a warrior to receive the volley. He had not to wait long. The whirling column advanced ; a stinging salute of glistening bullets was offered him ; then flourishing his arm and sheltering his face by lowering it, Shiel plunged manfully into the assailing cloud.

For five minutes he was enveloped in the blinding hail, every crease and cranny in his clothing getting filled with the driven ice. Through it all he strode vigorously

forward, and not until he saw the ground alight and sparkling and felt the genial touch of the sunlit atmosphere around him did he raise his face. When first he did so, he took a deep draught of the sparkling current, and threw his eyes upon the retreating storm. His next action was to divest himself of his jacket and shake it violently in the breeze. This replaced, his cap was similarly handled, but before his head was covered his hand was checked by the sound of a ringing laugh. He turned sharply round and confronted this new and unexpected assailant.

‘ Ye’ll be wet likely, Mr. Shiel.’

‘ What of that, my lass ? I’m not made of sugar.’

‘ True enough,’ cried she readily, with a significant nod.

‘ I suppose you are, as you take so much trouble to keep yourself dry,’ was his retort, eyeing her from head to foot.

‘ Daursay.’

‘ Where did you get to?’

‘ Under the whin buss, o’ course. There’s no that choice of bield on the heugh side.’

‘ There isn’t, and I’m not fond of curling up like a hedgehog for any purpose whatsoever,’ returned Shiel, scornfully.

‘ I ken that nicely,’ came from the other, with unabashed incisiveness, as she turned and unconcernedly drew out an axe, the handle of which protruded from a tuft of gorse. And their unceremonious greeting was apparently at an end.

Without further speech Shiel watched the young woman don her leather gloves

and ply her implement vigorously to the root of the stubborn bush. Branch after branch she drew forth and laid apart, and at each disturbance of the dry impenetrable heart of the furze, where was accumulated the dust of years of crumbling decay, a dazed moth or two would flutter into the unwelcome day and be carried off irresistibly by the breeze.

Despite the commonplaceness of the young woman's garb, she could not present other than a picturesque object as she bent gracefully to her employment. Her skirts, enveloped in a coarse grey pinafore, were sufficiently short to show the masculine boots and a good share of the incipient muscular moulding above them. A bit of her arm peeped out between the top of the glove and her frock sleeve, and

the skin was white and smooth as marble. Her head was screened by a great wide bonnet of ample scope for repelling a too inquisitive sun or a rudely intrusive rain.

Shiel could not see her face, but he was familiar enough with its details. It was true that by his academical residence of late years the thread of old unsophisticated associations seemed to have been broken,—the behaviour of everybody at any rate thrust upon Shiel that it was so,—but none of them knew with what savage pertinacity the youth himself longed to repudiate such suggestion, and to take up the thread exactly where he had left it. Even such of the country's kin, (like this girl's own brother,) as were able to get through to college with their face full to the ministry,

were never the same thereafter ; how much more pronouncedly, therefore, must the son of ‘the priest’ have altered ? None the less surely, for the paragraphs in the local paper that had chronicled his father’s pride in his various academical distinctions.

But although Shiel knew well the outlines of Handsel’s face, he could not have filled in the shading necessary to reproduce the expression which at this moment characterised it, had he been affected with any thought of doing so. As a matter of fact, for all his familiarity with her, of her face as an object of expression, or of herself as an attractive or unattractive woman, he was very far from thinking. Another might have noted that there was upon the girl’s face an expression of intelligent

humour not common to the features of a pastoral coquette.

‘Let me have the axe, Handsel,’ said Shiel, at length, after some minutes’ silence. ‘I’m wet. It will dry me.’

Without waiting for assent or its opposite he stepped up to her, and leaning took the weapon from her hand.

‘Certainly,’ she said, relinquishing it, and stepping aside with that peculiar smile.

She took a piece of rope from the ground, and, as Shiel hewed manfully at the gorse, she bound together some of the pieces already severed. This done, she rolled the long end two or three times round her hand, and, casting the rope over one shoulder, set off to drag the bundle behind her.

‘Where are you taking it?’

‘To the dike yonder,’ she replied, without turning round.

‘Leave it there, and don’t build it,—but she went on without response.

The distance was some two hundred yards from where they were cutting, and, whilst Handsel went, her companion continued his labour. Presently he looked up, and, seeing her returning, again plied the axe.

‘Why are *you* doing this?’ he demanded, as the girl was tying another bundle.

‘Isn’t your father well yet?’

‘Why shouldn’t I?’ was the hasty, inconsequent reply.

Disregarding it, Shiel again fell to.

‘He’s no well yet,’ said she, presently, with tacit retraction of her former protest.

‘ But I didna think you’d do this after you’d been to college.’

‘ Why shouldn’t I?’

But, looking up, her laugh was irresistible, and Shiel was constrained to join in it.

‘ Why shouldn’t I, Handsel? Tell me that.’

‘ That’s just what I canna do,’ was her quick response. ‘ But I ken that it aye makes a difference, although I could never rightly guess why it should.’

‘ It only does so in feeble creatures,’ said Shiel, with energy, ‘ and I lay no claim to be classed with such.’

‘ Indeed you do not.’

‘ That storm and that plover, my lass, are worth a’ the colleges in the universe.’

She just glanced at his face as he regarded the patches of prismatic hues which flanked the storm columns, far away down the valley, and then they both worked again.

As she came and went in silent execution of her necessary labour, Shiel pondered her toilsome movements through the hazy medium of his own individual fancy, although the April sunshine obviously glistened in her eyes, and the careless elasticity never for a moment left her limbs. Shiel had been, with apparent truth, pronounced absolutely deficient in the sentimental, and it was from no mistaken solicitude for womanhood in the abstract that he grudged to his companion's muscles their healthful occupation. Indeed, amongst such as had contact with

him, his aggressive plea for the absolute independence of women was held his characteristic feature at present ; but the subtle source from which this requirement sprang was not so generally known, and owing to recent circumstances it was the parent philosophy which prevailed at the present moment. This independence of women was necessary only to check the multiplication of those in the predicament of these very independents, held Shiel, and everything ought to be sacrificed to the attainment of this end ; but this did not by any means prevent his indulging a savage arraignment of the antecedent circumstances when he saw any particular occasion, such as he discerned, for instance, in the position of this moorland girl.

After the manner of subjective philoso-

phers, it mattered not that the subject chosen for the lavishment of his principles should be a peculiarly unfortunate one. Apt ones enough there might be, but this chanced to have come to his hand. Nobody knew better than Shiel the ridiculous buoyancy of Handsel, her health, her altogether uncommon intelligence. The solitary toil amid wide wastes of barren moor had cast no shadow on her vigorous face, as obviously it ought. Flung, unasked, on the peaty desert of a hungry planet, she had readily found her feet and her sunward eyes, and made good use of both, instead of groping on all fours with a spine horizontal, as was theoretically to have been expected. The sun consequently, it seemed, had fallen in love with Handsel (whose very name implied the

sense of pleasure and gift in a fanciful mother, for she was born on New Year's Day, and had evidently come 'for handsel,' as is said in the district of her nativity,) and he had showered some of his enviable blessings on her. Her smock was coarse, certainly, her boots huge and masculine; but these were extrinsic, and not of the sun. His work only began in a closer intimacy than either of them. The warm clay was his, and the flame which inspired it, and both were his glory. In immaculate sport he had rounded and rounded the one,—adding day by day some subtle, beauteous line here, some tender, ampler moulding there, some richness of appropriate tint everywhere,—and for the other he seemed simply to have parted with one whole sparkling ray of his own. Shiel,

however, viewed her with commiserating indignation.

When she returned to him and said that there was enough, the sounds of the axe ceased. Shiel took the rope from her without comment, tied the branches together, and dragged them away over the wet and glittering grass.

They worked jointly at the building of the gorse into the wall, placing the pieces under the heavy top stones, so that their ends protruded from each side, and thus served as an effectual check to the ‘louping’ sheep, to whom a five-foot wall is in itself but a trumpery obstacle.

‘You’ll know nothing of my cousin Glen, Mr. Shiel?’ asked the girl presently.

‘I don’t; except that she is still in her situation at Oxford, and that I don’t

think the town a particularly good place for her.'

' Likely,' muttered Handsel. ' She has not written to me for two months.'

' What else can you expect?' cried Shiel. ' So long as the crime of parentage is perpetrated, do you look for bliss in the land ?'

' Certainly I do,' laughed the other, not new to one or other of his extravagances.

' Well, Handsel, tell me this,' he renewed in all solemnity, standing back in order to face her : ' your father is ill ; very likely will never be well again, you say ; can you pretend to say that his conduct is other than criminal in flinging you alone on an inhuman world, to let you shift as you best can ?'

' He has not killed himself.'

‘How on earth does that affect the argument? I am not talking of his death only, but of his marriage and parentage of you. He didn’t ask you if you would like to come here and fight with all the darknesses of a universe——’

‘I should have said ay if he had,’ laughed the girl, putting her hair behind her ear as the wind ruffled it. ‘Look ahint you, man. Do you call that darkness?’

‘—Not intellectual darknesses merely, for some people are too obtuse to discern any: but material squalor. Wait until you have had a month or two of service with aliens, like your cousin Glen, and then tell me how you appreciate your world of blessings. You’ll alter your philosophy, I think.’

‘I dinna think it. For one thing, I should never enter into *that* service of aliens.’

‘What difference can it make? What will you do when you are alone, then?’

‘Oh, just cry a little, and then work again.’

Shiel looked at her with one gathered stare of inexpressible impatience, then turned and incontinently left her.

Handsel showed no surprise. She just paused in her work and looked after him, smiling supremely.

‘Ye’re a fine lad, Mr. Shiel,’ was the complacent soliloquy, ‘but ye’re sair fashed the day.’

She glanced once or twice at the impetuous figure as it scaled the slope behind her, but she looked again and it

was gone. Handsel proceeded with her work, feeling no more lonely than before.

A few minutes later she chanced to look again, and then, on the top of the cairn which crowned the fell, prominent against the sky, she saw a human form facing the wind. Apparently she had expected it, for, after making an audible comment, she went on as before. But she could not, on the instant, dispel all thought of her erratic visitor. It was long since she had seen him—several months, that was ; longer since she had had with him such scrap of familiar contact ; yet she found him, in generalities, little altered. Aggressive, impulsive above all else in her experience, he had ever been, and her estimate carried her far back into the unrestrained

familiarity of childhood. There was the inevitable smile as she recalled those far-off incidents; unconsciously formative for her, too, in the experience—hardly more consciously so in the now maturer retrospect. Those impetuous explorations of the hills, in which the goats were rivalled in temerity and immunity from harm, when, the strength of the slighter Ebba giving out perchance, his unflinching hand dragged her alone to his fearless enterprise. As a contrast to her own less hardy brothers, Shiel had then slipped into Handsel's vigorous ideals of the race, and if, with the inevitable modification of years, he still presided there, it must but be in a calm, impersonal manner, seeing the frank ingenuousness of her demeanour towards him.

The wind whistled around her, and the curlews called, and Handsel gradually passed on to her own more peculiar topics. There was no self-pity about her, no metaphysical introspection. Educated she was to a somewhat exceptional degree owing to peculiar opportunities, but something in her constitution had precluded the fostering of subjective growths. Life remained to her a humorous, but very practical matter.

It was scarcely with surprise that, as she worked and pondered, she heard that voice once more behind her.

‘Is James a minister yet?’ asked Shiel, as though their conversation had never been broken.

‘He is.’

‘Where has he gone to?’

‘Assistant to the minister at Morpeth.’

‘I suppose you would live with him if your father died?’

‘I dinna think it . . . But I hardly know yet what I’d do.’

‘Oh, well, good-bye . . .’ When a few yards off he stopped and turned. ‘I shall go back to Oxford this afternoon,’ he asked. ‘Anything I can take for you to Glen?’

‘Nothing, thank you.’

Shiel strode down the hill in the direction of the church and his father’s vicarage.

He went straight to his sister’s room, just tapping at the door and entering. She looked up from a pen-and-ink drawing over which she bent.

‘I’m going after lunch, Abb. It will be better at present.’

‘ In what direction ? ’

‘ Address to Oxford. I will in due course send you any change.’ He looked over her as he spoke. ‘ That’s not bad.’

‘ You think not ? ’ she said, drawing back her head in a pose.

‘ Not at all ; and, by-the-by, they’ve printed a paper of mine in this month’s “ Wargent’s,” ’ added he, glancing off. ‘ About women, mainly. You would hardly care to see it, I suppose ? ’

‘ Certainly I should.’

‘ I thought that after your desertion to the Philistines it would only irritate you.’

‘ I should like to see it none the less.’

He went from the room and returned with a black bag. From it he took out and handed to his sister the well-known monthly, with a carelessness which, even

in him, was doubtless mainly affected. Ebba took no pains to conceal her interest. She handed the periodical for a few seconds like a connoisseur would do an article of *vertu*, and then she ran the edges off her thumb before it.

‘ Why not get your living by literature, Shiel ? Surely that would preserve the——’

‘ Don’t reopen that, Ebba,’ he exclaimed with a frown. ‘ You know my position, and that settles it. I am not going to part with you in a quarrel. If I like to write anything you needn’t call it getting my living.’

Ebba glanced at the pages in silence, then put the book down.

‘ Yes, it looks promising.’

‘ By-the-by, does that girl Glen Aiken-

shaw ever communicate with you?
Just write to her, will you?'

Mr. Wanless had his dinner in the library alone, and after the two others had had theirs, Shiel left the vicarage again.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCHOLAR GIPSY.

ACCORDING to intent, then, Shiel departed, mainly in pique and without any defined purpose in his steps. He had come to Linnbrig but the day before, with the object of indulging in a period of imaginative indolence amidst the rugged solitudes upon which his intellectual frame had even yet very much of its conscious foundation, and when his father's unexpected attitude had routed this intention,

once more the youth had impetuously wandered forth.

When he reached the station he resolved upon Oxford as his destination. His academical career had as a fact ended with the last Michaelmas term; but pending the discovery of some new and sufficiently elastic scope for his imaginative capabilities, Shiel still retained rooms in the town, for the accommodation mainly of such multifarious possessions as time had accumulated about him,—not least, many hundreds of volumes in the most various branches of literature,—and to this shelter he now accordingly repaired.

It was not from any pronounced sense of congeniality that Wanless retained a footing in the purlieus of his university. His position there had been throughout an

extremely odd one, and not such as was likely to give rise to any strong social or intellectual predilection, had such ever been Shiel's constitutional propensity. Even amongst men of his own time and standing he had made few friends, and positively no intimates ; and by those who were set in authority over him, he was viewed from first to last with a more or less hopeless curiosity.

Of course his life in the hills had much to answer for in this unconventional development. An intellect of restless activity nursed up amidst a rugged seclusion of place and circumstance gets inevitably thrust very near to the root of things. The whole of Shiel's life had been passed in the vicarage of Linnbrig, where the remoteness of mere locality had

been immeasurably intensified by the absence of a mother's society and by the presence of a father given over wholly to the habits of a recluse. The fervid imaginations of the brother and sister had, under such circumstances, found for themselves all sorts of extraordinary outlets, largely in independence of any existing world about them, and not unnaturally, upon occasion, in actual defiance of it. The only restraints of which their intellects were conscious were those gleaned from a library of notable comprehensiveness, wherein both were permitted to browse indiscriminately without restriction or interference, if also without guidance of any sort. In what we speak of technically as 'education,' they had certainly been conducted with particular

efficiency by their father who, probably for his own convenience rather than from any principle or conviction, had liberally ignored the matter of sex in his instructions. How thoroughly the vicar had done his work was subsequently proved by Shiel at Oxford, and his successes might be fairly taken as representative also of the attainments of his sister, as the clergyman had always averred that he was unable to distinguish between the intellectual capabilities of his two children.

This education, however, formed but a small part of the development of Shiel and Ebba in their life of seclusion, and certainly that part the least significant. Of their imaginative efforts, of their speculations dauntless and profound upon any

and every topic which can occur to the mind of man, their father knew virtually nothing. That his daughter gave him occasionally a sketch of remarkable excellence, and that his son had been known to versify with accuracy and taste, were small matters to the clergyman ; for as he had never been deluded into imagining himself an ordinary individual, he would hardly be surprised at offspring from himself proving in its turn somewhat extraordinary. However, he never displayed the smallest curiosity with regard to that or anything else about them. He talked to them as to independent equals, but always upon some independent topic far removed from individual concerns.

It is needless to say that a young man

of such unusual antecedents, appeared as rather an unmanageable quantity upon the social scene of Oxford, and that he should in the air of academic polish find himself singularly alone. Being of distinctly picturesque exterior, the customary overtures could readily have been his, had he not shown so unmistakably the attitude he assumed. The more civilized element about him naturally soon tired of making effort at a thankless manipulation of so tantalizing an anomaly. This unclubability, very early detected, had influenced strongly the undergraduate's development; for it had engrafted upon a constitutional pride of sufficiently inconvenient proportions an unreasoning devotion to the ungregarious quality

which circumstances had fostered, at the same time that it had incited to a pugnacious assertion of the intellectual power latent in the individual. Thus his rugged power, uncontrolled by any civilized convention, alternately attracted and repelled. Even his tutor had failed to handle him. This gentleman was more than satisfied with him academically,—after the recognition of the savage reticence of the intelligent nondescript,—and had unwittingly earned the ardent, if undemonstrative affection of his pupil, by dubbing him the Scholar Gipsy, a title betraying a piece of definite insight in the former, which ought to have led to more determinate issues between them. But this tutor was not the gentleman for the opportunity. It passed, and the

scholar's development proceeded as though the modifying influence had never dawned.

To all the general influences of the place, Wanless was equally impervious. From active religious matters he held himself strictly aloof, as also from the other numerous forms of social amenities by which active undergraduates are waylaid. Even athletics he had eyed askance, with the solitary exception of boating. As in all else that he selected, Shiel's power upon the river was soon a matter of common approbation. With the undergraduates' literary circle, as was to be expected, he occasionally dallied ; but, despite his omnivorous propensities in the direction of imaginative letters, in company he was found singularly uncom-

municative, and generally confined his efforts to some savage cataclysmic criticism of the idol of his friends, or some equally exaggerative laudation of an obscure effort of which nobody else had ever heard. But although in this, as in all else he touched, the man's power was not to be ignored, the effect was little less than that of a bomb when one day it was announced that Mr. Shiel Wanless was the winner of Sir Roger Newdigate's prize for English verse ; an effect in no degree lessened by the publication of the poem, either as regarded the mystery of its authorship, or the singular boldness of the august judges in awarding it the palm. It was rumoured, by more or less waggish or malicious gossips, that these latter privately apologized to any ladies or

others of the Tupper persuasion who ventured to hold up their temerity to criticism, offering, in extenuation of their audacity, the overpowering literary pre-eminence of Shiel's production over those entering into competition with it. Undeniably it created a stir, and to any that had been in doubt, the perusal of his verses, whether by way of approbation or the reverse, brought irresistible conviction that there was something in that enigmatical 'man from the north,' as Shiel was very generally designated, beyond what his repellent ungeniality gave hint of.

Clearly, then, it was not to the charms of social diversion that Wanless yielded when he turned his steps in the direction of Oxford. Social needs were

altogether beyond him, and although as an individual he indulged in no flagrant warfare with the conventions of society, there was an aggressive independence in his general demeanour, affording evidence that the bland respectability and cultivated aplomb which follow as of course in the academic wake, had not found soil whereon to flourish in this particular graduate.

Shiel travelled direct, but was unable to get beyond Birmingham on the day of his departure. In the course of the following afternoon he completed what remained of his journey.

Sundry letters awaited him at his lodgings,—arrived that day. There were but four,—from which two were to be deducted as impersonal circulars,—but

apparently they required prolonged consideration. From five o'clock, the hour of his arrival, until twilight had closed in resolutely about him, he sat with his pipe, drinking tea, and with no more obvious employment than those two or three letters afforded. After dark he went out.

It was a fine, windy night, and Shiel walked briskly, as it seemed with a purpose. At Carfax he was touched upon the shoulder, and, looking up, he greeted an acquaintance.

‘ What—you here ! ’ cried the assailant, in surprise. ‘ By-the-by, have you seen Borland ? ’

‘ Borland—no,’ growled Shiel, as though sniffing an assault.

‘ You’d better. I believe Lord Purbeck—’

' Damn Lord Purbeck !' vociferated the other, and turned to go ; but checking himself, he refaced his antagonist, whose features betrayed a broad grin in the lamp-light. ' Do you know whether Pettipher is up ?'

' He is. I have seen him to-night. I believe he is at this moment at a symposium of Burgundy Smart's of New.'

' Thank you. Good-night.'

Therewith Shiel crossed over to the High Street, his purpose shelved for the course of that night at least. He strode down the deserted pavement, with much the same step as he had traversed his northern moors, glancing occasionally at a glimpse of architectural picturesqueness revealed by the lamps, and sometimes at

the very brilliant stars overhead. He made no pause until he was at Magdalen Bridge ; then he stopped to look over at the water.

Truth to tell, the man was in something of an exhilarating glow. Even to his self-reliant soul there was, after all, something animating in being intellectually sought after, and such he deemed his pre-eminent position at that particular moment. Visions of universal war stretched far out into the darkness around him—for his intellect at this phase was nothing if not pugnacious,—and he could now convince himself that he felt definite inclination for the conflict. Why should he not, after all, mobilize his forces and give system to his spasmodic onslaughts ? The sense of

vigour was not wanting, and at Shiel's age this is simply synonymous with accomplishment.

The clue lay in one of his letters. It was from a gentleman of moment, Mr. Pettipher by name, and, amongst other of his ponderous recommendations, sole or main proprietor of an established London newspaper. By possession and by occasional residence he was a territorial neighbour of Linnbrig, and of generous condescension to the vicar there. It was for his son that Shiel had made inquiry; Mr. Cornelius Pettipher being still an undergraduate, with a term or two to run. Between the young men there had been acquaintanceship, but nothing more; no pronounced compatibility of temperament aiding them.

From Mr. Pettipher's neighbourly communication had Shiel taken fire; and in a manner too which presented a marked contrast to his equally emphatic reception of Lord Purbeck's very generous offer. That the logical outcome of Mr. Pettipher's overture could also be but a species of contemptible employment, from which the gross needs of material life would receive adequate supply, was not for the moment suspected by the enthusiast. Literary warfare stood apart, assuming a dazzling aspect to his gaze, and one in which the mere commercial nucleus found no sort of betrayal. He knew it not as a sordid mercenary levy; his vigorous idealism perceiving only the generous knight-errantry in which intellectual muscle might find its insatiable requirements, with no

incentive or reward beneath the intellectual virtue at which it aimed. Shiel was flagrantly the reverse of constitutionally indolent,—the plethoric tendency of his energy being indeed the very crux of his predicament,—and it is probable that his mind clutched with unconscious alacrity at this apparently congenial outlet for his impetuous forces. More or less literary his instincts had ever been, and more or less combative. In the repose of the artistic balance he had always been far behind his sister Ebba,—the only instance of intellectual acquirements with which it was possible to bring him into comparison. That article of his in the American monthly, to which he had referred his sister, was not the first testimony to the practicability of his powers,

but it was unquestionably the most important, if for no other reason than that it had drawn forth this stimulating proposal from the mighty Pettipher.

All was silent on the bridge, the wind in the trees only whistling appropriate comment upon Shiel's reflections there. If a passenger had passed him the man was not aware of it, for his eyes were bent upon the dark silently flowing water below, and his ears unnoting. At length he aroused himself to retrace his steps. He had taken but two of them when again he stopped. There *was* a figure just then coming up beside him, and beneath the lamp their eyes had met. That was the instant when Shiel stood. The other darted past him, but at the clutch of his hand stood trembling, weeping, before him.

Wanless leaned forward as though to confirm his vision.

'Yes, it's me,' whimpered the girl, for girl apparently it was.

'And what are you here for now?' asked Shiel, with singular sternness, some of the impetuousness of his recent reflections probably still about him.

'I'm going,' she said, petulantly, mastering her tears, 'going anywhere. It's nothing to anybody.'

'Stay, Glen; you are not going. What on earth is the meaning of this?'

He positively laid hold of her to check her further progress.

'It is nothing to you, Mr. Wanless,' cried she, with a renewal of her tears.

'It is everything to me. Have you been turned out?'

Circumlocution was at no time a faculty of his : at this moment he was more than ordinarily trenchant.

‘ I have gone,’ replied the girl, as she was able.

Shiel saw the necessity of a different handling, so he answered mildly. Thus she was induced to walk on beside him and take part in more coherent conversation. It then gradually appeared that she had abruptly relinquished her situation, (the one in which Shiel’s father had been instrumental in placing her,) after discord dire with her mistress; a consummation which, the other party to the conflict being known to him, caused Wanless unmitigated astonishment. So he walked on, gnawing his lips in silence for some moments.

‘And where do you propose to spend the night?’ he at length demanded. ‘You know, I suppose, that it is after nine o’clock?’

‘Anywhere,’ she muttered.

‘That is rank idiocy,’ was his explosive rejoinder. ‘You are not in the heather.’

She shrank from him in alarm.

‘You must return to the house at once,’ he resumed, less fiercely.

The manner of her answer surprised him, and rendered obvious the futility of persuasion or command alike.

‘Then come along with me.’

The girl at length acquiesced in his imperious assumption, and submissively went with him. He swiftly threaded the by-streets until, emerging at his lodgings, unceremoniously he took her in. All op-

position to his directions seemed at an end, and a wondering, stupefied gaze summed up the girl's attitude towards him.

When Shiel had turned up the gas, and was about to examine his charge further, she suddenly sank into an arm-chair and threatened hysteria. The man's energetic reception of her emotion was once more effectual, and she gazed at him again. As he returned the gaze, looking with rather fierce criticism into her face,—a pretty one, all tear-stained as it was,—he felt a singular thrill of enlightenment, and, turning away from her, he thrust the poker into the fire.

In the impetuosity of his actions, he had never for an instant suspected the real nature of the predicament, and, now that by some sudden flash of instinct it

stood revealed to him, even to his unwarped sense some momentary confusion was inevitable. This, however, was speedily surmounted, and he re-faced the girl.

‘ You will sleep here to-night, Glen,’—there seemed some accession of gentleness to his tone,—‘ and go home to-morrow. Promise me that.’

‘ No, sir. I shall not go home.’

His brow ruffled with impatience.

‘ Don’t make a bad case worse,’ cried Shiel. ‘ It is not to me what it is to most people, and what I tell you is only for your own security. You know nothing at all of the world, and, if you now rush out into it, you will only bring the most hideous distress upon yourself. The only possible safety for you is to go amongst friends.’

Even to a jury of matrons there could not have appeared any enormity in this young man of twenty-two thus descanting upon a delicate case of the kind. The singular composure and reassurance of the girl mainly affected by it was sufficient evidence of this.

‘Then I’ll go to Windylaw,’ said she, presently. ‘Uncle Gilholme ’ll take me in.’

‘That will do,’ assented Shiel, and then withdrew to see his landlady.

Some plausible representation was effected, and, finding no source of astonishment in any erratic device of her remarkable lodger, the good woman readily acceded to his requests. He himself should of course retire to an hotel for the night.

Before leaving the house, Shiel returned to the room where he had installed his

ward, and gave her some further peremptory instructions. Then, when about to leave, he turned to her with some abruptness.

‘Is marriage impossible?’

The question seemed to startle her, but at length she muttered an affirmative, and wept afresh.

‘Then I have the right to demand a name,’ he said, fiercely, leaning towards her.

She shook her head violently, but kept her face tightly screened by her two hands.

Shiel stood musing. Although primarily it was his territorial interest in this girl personally which actuated his reckless zeal, this by no means exhausted his concern with the situation. Much of his

recent speculation had turned upon what might be called the rationale of woman, and its relative effect upon civilization at large, and the occurrence of a case so immediately illustrating his topic of necessity appealed to him.

‘ You know that I have reasons for suspicion,’ he began again. ‘ Tell me, is it he ?’

She paid no heed to his inquiries for some moments, and Shiel felt constrained to abandon the attempt. He consequently gave her some parting instruction, and, walking over to the door, was about to leave the room. Then the girl raised her face impulsively, and stared across at him.

‘ Yes, it is him,’ she said, ‘ and he has refused to help me.’

'All right;' and Shiel departed forthwith. The absorbing considerations, which had so recently engaged him wholly, were non-existent of an instant. Some primal chord had been touched in him, and the deep vibration which had succeeded throughout his sensitive system had extinguished all else. It was characteristic of this youth that, upon a momentary summons, the whole of his vehement energy could be immediately concentrated, and rendered available for any imperative appeal. To him at such times no world unassociated with the matter on his mind had any manner of existence, so that the methods of his action were apt to assume an aspect of ridiculous, or even reprehensible, violence in the eyes of cool or indifferent observers.

Sundry eyed the stalking figure as it again traversed the streets. Its first errand was to the house whence the girl had fled. A few words with the astonished mistress there concluded this preliminary to his mission, and forthwith Shiel stalked to another quarter of the town.

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNBIDDEN GUEST.

THERE was a small social celebration proceeding in the rooms of Mr. Cuthbert Smart of New College, a gentleman chiefly famous amongst his contemporaries for the singular excellence of his Burgundian wines and the exceptional equability of his temper. He was one of those happily constituted individuals who, without any very pronounced personality in themselves,

have the faculty of recommending their modest characteristics to a wide and diverse circle of acquaintances, embracing representatives of most grades of intelligence, as well as mere deficiencies of it, that polished circumstances have put in their way.

In the marshalling of his hospitalities Cuthbert was a positive genius. A. never chanced to meet there that detestable snob B., just as B. himself was perfectly secure in Smart from the exasperating presence of that peculiarly insufferable prig A.; not that either A. or B., of course, individually, was on other than the best of terms with Smart, or was by any means other than (occasion fitting) a genial participant of Smart's catholic hospitality.

On the table were glasses, bottles, and

decanters, with a sprinkling of books and papers amongst them. It was late in the evening and some half dozen gentlemen sat or reclined in every attitude of graceful indolence, by a constant emission of fragrant whiffs, charging with an ever thickening haze the already overclouded atmosphere of the room. Through the mist was to be seen the tall attractive figure of the host, standing with his back to the fire, and in one hand the periodical from which he was audibly reading. His eye-glasses clipped gracefully a faultless nose, and the refined accents of his tongue in expressive modulation found their way through the effective medium of a scrupulously tended light-brown moustache. A general smoothness was the characteristic note of Mr. Smart, and every

visible trait reflected the placid temperament within.

Thus the whole of his personality inevitably, almost ludicrously, suggested a polite, wholly unconscious depreciation of the matter he was reading, despite the rhetorical enthusiasm which his tones were able occasionally to assume. There was nothing very astonishing in this, seeing that the matter upon which he was engaged was none other than the trenchant utterances of his paradoxical, and, as most asserted, dangerously heterodoxical friend Shiel Wanless, recently made public in the pages of that American monthly. Expressions of opinion at this or that,—jocular, commendatory, or unmistakably antagonistic,—escaped his hearers from time to time; but for the most part they

heard in silence. So the exposition proceeded, until a consensus of applause celebrated its close.

‘Yes, Kendal, you are right,’ said the host judicially, replacing his glass upon the mantel-piece. ‘It *is* a matter of vital moment to the future of the world.’

‘As is every matter affecting human existence,’ interposed a dogmatic one.

‘But this more than most.’

‘Not a bit.’

‘I contend that the sentimental relation between the sexes is the pivot of the whole social universe.’

‘Most sentimental intelligences do,’ replied he of dogma.

‘But, my dear fellow, it is not a question of sentiment or of science. It is simply a primordial fact.’

‘Of the poetic ages, Kendal, certainly,’ was the jocular retort.

‘And so of every age,’ asserted Kendal, a handsome, blue-eyed man of extremely attractive appearance. ‘The fact is, that that man from the north is wholly deficient in the sexual instinct. Now, look here, Pettipher, do you mean to say——’

‘I mean to say nothing, my dear sir.’

‘Can any rational civilization exist without one at least of the sexes making as it were a specialty of what you snub as sentiment? Heaven knows we are desirous of being material enough——’

‘In the annihilation of such specialty does any rational civilization alone exist,’ said Pettipher, in his dogmatic sarcasm; ‘in that at least Wanless is unassailably right.’

'But look here, Kendal,' interposed another, 'you ignore the real gist of the question. It isn't whether the sentimental interdependence of the sexes should wholly cease, but whether it should be made subsidiary to a more stable one,—one arising from the reason, the intellect. You cannot dispute *that* one point of Wanless, that the exclusively sentimental woman has conspicuously failed.'

'Failed!' cried Kendal. 'What on earth do you mean?'

'That the professional heritage of sentiment has debilitated woman, (hence, of course, men alike,) and is solely responsible for every form of iniquity perpetrated in this sort, and now hindering the progress of the world.'

'You seriously think that? . . . It is

worthy of a scrupulously scientific age. Quietly ignore,—nay, deliberately corrupt and misrepresent the essential principles of the system we are investigating, then sagely vilify the preposterous deductions to which our fatuity compels us. You have no standard of comparison, Newthorpe. It isn't because we have had too much sentiment, but too little of it that failure is apparent. Sentiment, like idealism of every kind, has found no place amongst mankind for many a generation.'

'Then surely it would be as well to try something more possible of acceptance,' Pettipher observed ironically.

'By all means,' said the pacific Smart, seeing it time to interpose; 'but look here. There is another aspect. I've recently

begun to make a specialty of female physiognomy. It is most——'

Smart's gravity of demeanour was of a sudden rudely interrupted by a volley of laughter.

' You're late in the day, Smart,' cried one. ' It's been my specialty since I was out of petticoats, as my walls sufficiently testify. Brownlow has a slight propensity that way ; Wilkins——'

' Pooh, pooh ! Physiognomy, I said, not physical geography. A stage beyond the apotheosis of the undress, Maurice. I only admit competitors who are dressed like Christians. It is to show how far intellectual development affects one way or the other the physical attractions. Not a very artistic notion, is it, Maurice ?'

‘ You’re getting as prosy as Wanless. I am blessed with the poetic temperament.’

‘ It was from a casual talk with Wanless that I was led to undertake it,’ said Smart, as he was unfolding a paper parcel which he had placed upon the table. ‘ You forget that *he* can write poetry too, old man.’

‘ Write poetry !’ cried the other, in disdain. ‘ What fool can’t ? Act it, I mean.’

‘ Perhaps act it too, if there’s any occasion. Now, look here !’

Smart scattered a goodly heap of ladies’ photographs on the table before them, in such attractive profusion as to elicit a whistle of surprised approval even from the gallant Maurice. All hands grabbed

at the enchanting pile with such marked alacrity as to discountenance for the moment the suggestion that the school of sentiment was in their day effete.

‘This isn’t half a bad idea,’ cried Maurice Newthorpe, as he gazed with much interest into the eyes of a beautiful young lady whose countenance had instantly engaged him.

‘Not half,’ assented another. ‘But what’s your theory, Smart? How does your seraglio differ from that of any poor ordinary mortal?’

‘Only this. So far as I can tell—from their general action in the world, you know—not one of these ladies\ is pledged to sentiment as a profession. They have all taken some definitely intellectual, or at any rate actively practical, part in the

doings of the world, wholly regardless of that delicate specialty, Kendal, which we consider their peculiar province.'

'But where are any of these to be met with in the flesh?' demanded Maurice, dallying with another set of attractive features.

'Doing their daily work, and not caring two pins whether you or I make eyes at them or no.'

'Don't they?' said the other, expressively. 'Then what do they get photographed for? . . . To illustrate a theory, no doubt; I forgot.'

'I say, who's this?' called out another interested one.

'Oh, that's Miss Sinclair, exploring Siberia on a donkey, you know.'

'She *was*,' said Maurice, drily, 'but she's

exploring matrimony *with* one now. She married some Colonel or other, so can now drive a pair.'

'There are some deuced nice girls here, whatever they are.'

'I think there are,' assented Smart, gravely. 'That? Oh, that's a friend of Pettipher's. A lady journalist working for the *Herald*.'

'But look here, Smart,' cried Maurice. 'Do you mean to assert that, if any one of these girls gets a suitable offer of marriage, she will forswear the sentimental calling?'

'I assert nothing. All I know is, that they have begun life in simple indifference to it, and with an ambition above matrimony, and a power of enterprise out-

stripping the traditional nursery-governess. I was under a misconception. The odd part about it is, that I have not been able to procure a really plain face with which the ambition can be associated. I can tell you no more. You'll see that the respective profession of each is written at the back of the photograph.'

After disposing of a comely young lady whom he had loudly proclaimed to be a medical student, Maurice had taken up another which Pettipher had just replaced without comment.

'This isn't marked, Smart,' cried the irrepressible chevalier, holding forth the object of his inquiry to be enlightened.

Thereupon Pettipher looked with curious subtlety into his host's face.

'That—oh, well, she's a private lady—but in the same category. It is Wanless's sister.'

'That is! The only one I wouldn't swear to succeed with,' muttered Maurice.

'Where is Wanless's sister?' cried a neighbour. 'That ought to be interesting.'

And there was a general movement towards this centre of attraction.

Pettipher alone held back, and on this account he was the only one to be cognisant of a tap at the door. He was lighting a fresh cigar; when his lips were free he informed Smart of the occurrence. The summons was more audibly repeated.

Smart walked over to the doorway. He exchanged a few words with somebody there, and immediately a solid figure, wrap-

ped in an overcoat, came unceremoniously forward into the room, introducing a breath of the keen night air into the close atmosphere of talk and tobacco-smoke. There was a frown on Smart's smooth countenance when he faced the room, but instantly it gave place to a look of consternation and chagrin.

The group engaged with the various aspects of Ebba's photograph had not turned round, and at that particular moment Newthorpe held the portrait aloft at arm's length, whilst the several beholders cast their heads into the correct pose for a critical survey of the countenance. The eyes of Smart and of Pettipher were upon the intruder—his were upon the photograph which was exciting so much attention, in ominous concentration.

The disturbing influence so suddenly introduced into the genial atmosphere affected the group simultaneously, and they turned their faces like sheep of one accord. Thus they confronted Mr. Shiel Wanless in person, and the effect was electrical.

‘Smart——’ Shiel began, but checked himself. He simply stepped forward and took the photograph from Newthorpe’s fingers, then thrust it into his own pocket. There was an attempt at jocular familiarity, but it was disregarded, and Shiel turned in grim inflexibility to Pettipher, who betrayed surprise at the selection.

‘I want you,’ was all he said.

‘I shall be glad to enter into any appointment.’

‘Come, sit down, man,’ said Smart.

‘Take off your coat. The discussion is trivial without you. You see our text.’ He pointed to the review from which he had been reading; but the other paid no heed.

‘I want you now,’ said Shiel to Pettipher. ‘It is important.’

Their eyes met, and to the general astonishment Pettipher rose to depart.

Smart’s interposition was again ineffectual, and the two went without another word.

‘Confound the man for an impertinent puppy,’ exclaimed one, emphatically, when the door was closed, and order again restored. ‘You ought not to have let him in, Smart.’

‘There was small letting,’ replied the host, as nearly displaying vexation as

was possible to him. ‘Really, it isn’t civil. I had no idea the fellow was up here.’

‘Pettipher was a fool to humour him, under such circumstances.’

‘Literary independence and unconvention, I suppose,’ suggested another.

Thus for a short time was much latent pique and resentment against the free-handed methods of Wanless in general given audible vent to; a display well exemplifying the common attitude of rational beings towards the man, quite independently of the particular piece of aggravation upon which the present remarks were founded. It was some time before serenity was restored.

Smart himself seemed exceptionally subdued by the incident. He heard all

that there was to be said about it with apparent acquiescence, but contributed nothing to the discussion.

In the meantime, Shiel had withdrawn with Pettipher to the rooms of the latter. Wanless refused to enter upon any explanation until they were enclosed there, and with a singular degree of resignation his companion submitted.

‘So you have been discussing the woman question,’ said Shiel, with superbly restrained sarcasm. ‘What were your general conclusions?’

‘You evidently come with a declaration of war,’ remarked Pettipher, making himself easy in a chair. ‘I can’t pretend to conceive your reasons for it, or the advantages you expect to derive. Pray enlighten me.’

'I will. In my philosophy of the universe, the perception of individual responsibility holds a somewhat prominent position; are there any circumstances under which you would acknowledge its influence?'

'I have not devoted much attention to speculative ethics,' replied the other, with a shrug.

'That is probable enough; but I require your attention now upon a point of practice. Just try for a moment to forget your sleek complacency in a fat chimerical existence, and fancy in its place a hungry, naked reality, confronted by the world of fact. It is difficult for you, I know, but try. Fancy further a conscious existence in this world under every possible adversity that ironical nature and diabolical

human fatuity can jointly impose, and tell me whether the contemplation delights you.'

'It transcends my modest capacity,' replied Pettipher, blowing at his cigar.

'Then I will illustrate it to you. Come with me.'

'I am not in the humour for it, thank you. I shall be glad to discuss anything you wish at a more convenient time.'

'Do you think I am studying your convenience?' exclaimed Shiel, fiercely, with a look from which the other turned.
'I require you to come with me now.'

'Hang it, man, do you think I am going to tolerate this damned insolence?' cried Pettipher, getting up angrily. 'I neither know nor care to what all your rodomon-tade may tend, but you can go. I——'

They quarrelled for a minute or two,

then went out together. Shiel had triumphed.

In a squalid back street some time later, were two figures clad in respectable overcoats striding along speechless. Of a sudden, in a silent, deserted part, one stopped, and drew close to a window, level with the pavement; he then summoned his companion beside him. No blind was drawn, and the light from a tallow candle flickering within illumined the dirty panes faintly. Nevertheless, by peering through the glass the interior was visible, and it was a grimy scene which was presented. Mere material squalor was focussed in a human centre. On the edge of a pallet bed sat a girl barely clad, the heap of her thrown-off garments lying

on the floor, with an infant at her breast. Grace of physique was still visible in the shrunken girlish figure, as it bent over the child, and the face betrayed no consciousness of suffering, despite the surroundings. When the girl laid the child upon the bed, the onlookers had gone.

‘Presumably she knew her bargain,’ commented Pettipher, when they were in his room again.

‘Certainly, but did the other?’

‘What other?’

‘The only one for whom such episodes have any shadow of significance,’ said Shiel, vehemently. ‘Do you think I concern myself about the conscious agents in them—about *their* wrongs and moralities? As you delicately say, they doubtless knew

their bargain. But can any possible sufferings to which they have to submit compare with the exquisite torture they inflict by originating an existence, not to say an existence of that kind? Can any words possibly characterise their enormity in inflicting such torture?

'I was not aware that existence was such an insufferable infliction.'

'I should not expect you to be,' replied Shiel, with difficulty repressing his excitement. 'Some degree of honesty and imagination is necessary to the perception. But if I grant you that the pill is delectable through a density of gilding, what is it in *that* form of appalling nakedness? And what would you say of this fat gilded existence scattering unconcernedly those hideous naked ones?'

‘I want to know to what this homily tends?’

‘Of that you are sufficiently aware. I demand some instant pecuniary reparation for the girl Aikenshaw, and substantial provision in case of contingencies.’

‘I shall be glad to receive first an explanation of your intimacy with her. I hardly expected so practical a consummation to a diatribe so transcendental.’

‘It is only by means of such consummations that certain organisms can be affected.’

‘What do you know about her, or about me in connection with her?’

Shiel gave him vaguely the facts of that night’s encounter. Pettipher frowned.

‘If she knew her bargain,’ continued

Wanless, ‘ I shall take it upon me to see that you know yours.’

Pettipher burst into a fit of uncontrolled passion, and defied his antagonist. Thus for some time they wrangled.

Shiel stood immovable, as fully prepared for physical as moral persuasion, if it should be needful ; but it was not. Presently he left, with the sum which he had demanded in his possession.

Before leaving the college precincts he went over to Smart again. He paused at the door, and, hearing all silent, tapped. Cuthbert was alone, nursing his foot, and the re-appearance of Wanless seemed to amaze him. The latter held forth his hand, which the imperturbable took but dubiously.

‘ It was not civil, Shiel,’ he muttered.

'Was it civil to hold *her* up to the grins of that imbecile crew?' asked Shiel.

'Certainly,' replied the other, who had now pondered the predicament. 'It was in honourable discussion, and you must know that had any breath of a contrary colour been hazarded, I should have known how to receive it.'

'I believe you, Cuddie,' was the placable rejoinder. 'I was hot. Here she is.'

And the photograph was restored. They talked but for a short time and Wanless departed.

Early the next morning Shiel presented himself again at his lodgings. He found the distressed maiden that he had befriended very much transformed, and apparently suffering but little as she partook of the breakfast which was his. She

was attractively attired, and, had his benevolence reflected, in a manner wholly different from that of the previous evening. She assumed grave looks in face of his sober demeanour, but they sat oddly upon her.

Wanless produced a time-table from his pocket, and proceeded in a most business-like manner to sketch out her journey for the day. The names of the places as they were uttered seemed to have a stimulating effect upon her, and she entered with alacrity into the scheme.

The young woman was obviously endowed with one of those lightly imaginative temperaments that find a speedy refuge from themselves in any fitting change of place or of circumstance. The mere thought of an immediate escape to the

lonely hills, with which she inevitably associated a sense of freedom and absence of all care, was enough to annihilate, for the present at least, the more shaded aspect of her departure. Perhaps her companion detected this, and felt impatience at it; at any rate, as she expanded, he assumed a stricter guise, verging at times indeed upon ‘an austere regard of control.’

It was this interview which was able to apprise even Shiel’s self-contained idealism that it might not be expedient for him to travel northward in Glen’s immediate company, as in the calm of previous reflection he had fully determined. Consequently he did not mention it as a proposal.

Later he saw her safely commence her journey, then he returned to the contemplation of his own affairs.

Mr. Pettipher had asked him to come and see him, dating his letter from his Northumberland residence. Having accepted the proposal, as we know, upon his own understanding, Shiel saw no reason for any modification of it from the adventure of the previous evening. That Cornelius would assume his place at the *Herald*—had indeed been elaborately trained for it,—was matter of notoriety; but that hardly seemed to bear upon the situation at present. Mr. Pettipher was by no means an old man, and furthermore, as Shiel knew him, was scarcely the individual to be influenced by private animosities of his son's. Let what was to come, therefore, have its appointed order, and let the needs of to-day be sufficient unto themselves. But he wasn't going

after a situation. Moderate alacrity would suit best with individual dignity upon such an occasion. A wholly uncompromising letter was consequently sent to the journalistic potentate, and Shiel determined to go again to the north on the following day.

CHAPTER V.

THE BURDEN OF THE HILLS.

THE refuge of Windylaw had for some subtle reason instantly recommended itself to the fancy of Glen, although to a casual observer there would have appeared as little congruity in her presenting herself in such a predicament at the door of the renowned theologian David Gilholme as at that of her own father. But no doubt Glen had sufficient reason for her decision, as, despite the present appearances, she

was a young lady of abundant resource in matters which pertained to her own convenience. Her cousin Handsel's abode was at least at no inconvenient distance from the Linnbrig vicarage, and it was scarcely possible that Glen could be indifferent to the consideration which all the members of that household had persistently extended to her. This had hitherto been accepted very much as a matter of course, but this last magnanimity of Shiel could not easily be so. Coming at such a moment, and in so completely voluntary a manner, it had made deep impression, of a characteristic kind, upon Glen's romantic fancy. Disinterested philosophy scarce appealed to her as such, and, failing this, Shiel's activity might argue very many extraordinary things, or, upon an estimate

even still lower, possibilities quite as extraordinary.

But, as it chanced, neither Glen nor Shiel knew exactly to what circumstances the fugitive was hastening; whether the knowledge would have materially affected their movements, or those at least of one of them, need hardly be inquired. In the case of Shiel undoubtedly it would; but, after all, his influence was limited.

Not long after Shiel's parting with Handsel on the hill-side, the girl had gathered up her implements and trudged homewards for her mid-day meal. She lived alone with her father in a house at the very head of the defile, about two miles from Linnbrig Church and vicarage. The James inquired of by Shiel was her existent brother; another she had who had

been obliged to emigrate, or otherwise become submerged, from an overweening confidence in an actively imaginative temperament,—somebody with whom he had come in contact having invoked the material power in deprecation of its further play. The name of their small sheep-farm was Windylaw, held by David Gilholme throughout his life, as it had been held by his father before him. Previous to that they had been a Roxburghshire family, of the neighbourhood of Mossburnford.

The cloud shadows flitted over the girl as she descended the bald slope,—the bracken, the heather, and the grey bent grass being with her alternately solemn and gay. As she got down, the wind ceased to ruffle her, and its jovial whistle no longer drowned the soothing burden

of the water rising from below. The opposing height frowned precipitous before her, relieved only here and there by the white dot of a climbing sheep. Naturally Handsel's observation of the scene, and the conscious effect of it upon her, were but general enough. Her temperament would have ensured this, even if the life-long use had been wanting.

Presently she paused, and looked consciously enough before her. The house was scarce two hundred yards off, and upon it her eyes were fixed, an expression of eager scrutiny upon her comely face. For a moment nothing appeared to justify her action,—no sound save the whining of an invisible dog and the cackle of some geese which glistened in the sun at a short distance from the house. Still

Hansel stood, the serenity of her features still visibly affected, but the cause as persistently obscure. Then at last that dog appeared, just before the house, and again raised its voice to the hills ; after standing as though to receive echoing answer from the mountain silences, scampered impetuously forward to where Hansel was in thought, and did not slacken his pace until crouching at her feet.

‘ What news, Robin ?’ said the girl.

He looked at her and answered with a howl ; then the two went forward.

The Linnburn was but an infant stream to be leapt, here at Windylaw. A lichened birch-tree or two overhung its brown sparkling course, and a stunted bush was to be seen by the crease up the hill-side which

marked the cradle of the water. Half-way up, scarce a quarter of a mile off, the crease was stopped by a small grey crag, and there the burn began.

The scene was desolate in the extreme. Shut in on all sides by lofty hills (for the stream took a rectangular turn not far below), this nook formed a little world unto itself. There was no suggestion from the heights around; for, although their sides were steep, all shoulders were uniformly rounded, and wholly destitute of vegetation, save that of the short wiry grass with which they all were clad. Not even the heather was to be seen here, and sounds became but an emphasized variety of silence.

The house which forms for us the centre of this secluded world lay on the green a

few yards from the edge of the burn. It was a stone building of three chambers all on the ground, roofed with blue slate in recent years, and at one end a piece of ground had been enclosed for a cabbage-garden. Handsel and her dog approached the door slowly, now that they had jumped the stream, for over both the solitude seemed to exercise an unusual sway. A cloud of solid grey fringed with silver, which had just reached the sun, flung a few drops over them,—drops which descended singly in idle uncertainty, as though playing with the sunbeam on which they rode; but still the girl lingered. The dog looked up at her inquiringly once or twice, and she returned the gaze. Then he glanced at the door ajar, and would have howled, but that his

mistress forbade him. When she entered, he slunk in silently after her.

In the inner doorway Handsel stood with her hand upon the latch.

‘ Father,’ she said, addressing the man sitting at the table ; but he did not immediately answer.

He was sitting there absorbed in papers which lay outspread before him. The girl walked forwards.

‘ All right, father ?’

Still he would not answer.

The face was scarcely visible in its posing attitude, and shaded as it was by an upraised hand. All attention was for those open documents scattered in confusion. They had a singularly sophisticated appearance these papers, not much in accord with the rugged figure to which

they appertained. Their methodical folds, extreme accuracy of margin and calligraphy, visible at a distance, suggested but one extraction, and that came as an incongruous intrusion upon the general effect. Without that prim array, the old man, the plain, almost bare interior, and the sense of overwhelming solitude which the place inspired, formed a whole apart and scarcely touched the practical world with which man is mainly familiar. From beneath the paper which immediately engaged the reader's attention appeared a portion of bank-notes, with loose gold upon them ; and it was here that Handsel's eyes were resting, although, as it appeared from the expression of her features, with but scant consciousness of the fact.

The dog, slinking up to his master, tried

to engage his attention, but, failing, uttered an unearthly howl. This aroused the girl, and one look from her silenced the animal. She walked over to her father and took his hand. Her face blanched as she did so, but leaning down she took him in her arms and positively lifted him to the box-bed against the wall.

When she had composed him upon the pillow, she gathered papers and money from the table, and thrusting them roughly and hurriedly into an open drawer, closed and locked it, putting the key into her pocket. Having also closed the bed like a cupboard, she went out of the house, fastening the door behind her.

Handsel's remarks to Wanless had shown her not wholly unprepared for this consummation, if the suddenness and

method of it were hardly what she had looked for. It now smote her with more tragic force than any mere hazy expectation could give her hint of. She fled from the house, hurrying down the burnside in heedless agitation, all the more violently affected because tears had not come to her. Strong, independent, and in some respects masculine the girl was,—solid qualities which in face of spiritual anguish exact a penalty. ‘Cry a little and then work again,’ she had said to Shiel in prospect of this very predicament, and the words, as it seemed, lightly uttered, now recurred to her. If she could but cry,—ever so little. The sudden revelation of unknown solitude would be less intolerable. She had been snow-bound in solitude in this desolate valley, her father absent, when

nothing but a moaning chaos of literally entombing darkness overwhelmed her cottage, and her voice, had she raised it, would have had to travel miles of this icy wilderness before falling on a human ear,— and she had enjoyed it; had done battle through the night with the piling snow-drifts, giving them howl for howl, and jubilantly resenting their wild efforts to enshroud her. In autumn fogs she had been benighted on the hills, lucky if there were so much as a crag to screen her, or a bed of deep heather wherein to fold herself, and she had reposed there gleefully. In a host of other ways had she confronted the essential solitude of deep mountain silence in fair weather and in foul; but never until this moment had she realized

what it was to feel the burden of being alone.

It was on the arm of an alder-tree which she held to cross the water that she ultimately found relief. There she bowed her face and wept freely.

A touch upon her shoulder first aroused her, and looking up, affrighted at the unexpected interruption, she met the benevolent gaze of an elderly gentleman just alighted from his horse. His garb betokened the ministerial profession in some unsophisticated kind, and face and manner fully sustained the suggestion. His hand remained on the girl's shoulder where he had placed it, and in a tone of simple gravity, strongly tinged with the expressive accent of the north, he said,

‘Then he is gone, Handsel.’

The girl was quickly composed; the restored sense of human contact,—the consciousness of being seen,—touched the aggressive, the masculine in her, and she was again erect. The manner of her discovery was briefly detailed and practical requirements immediately discussed. All benevolent persuasion to induce her to go with him to the manse was civilly resisted, her only want was to be again alone.

‘You’ll write a word to James for me, Mr. Reid. He can be through to-morrow. It will be a sair shock to him, poor man.’

‘To be sure; to be sure. But you’d better come beside Mrs. Reid until the morning. Do now, my lass.’

Hansel simply shook his hand silently, and turned again up the stream. She was soon conscious of a sense of relief at her escape from immediate contact with practical persons which the minister's appearance had afforded her, and under it her mind speedily recovered its accustomed tone.

During the hour or two which of necessity elapsed before the return of the minister, the girl did not re-enter the house. Some masculine employment engaged her in the neighbourhood of the cottage; her father's protracted illness, and, as neighbours failed not to insinuate, constitutional parsimony, having brought all necessary labour about the small moorland home-stead within her immediate province. All the time, her active brain, rather than her

passionate emotions, kept pace with her muscular effort, and she soon became absorbed in a more or less critical survey of the predicament in which events had placed her, and which of course came not wholly as a novel presentation to her reflective sense.

Devoted to her father she had unquestionably been, in the more practical aspect of filial devotion, that is, and so far only as was consistent with a temperament in no respect pre-eminently domestic. Tenderness was not one of the most obvious of Handsel's attributes ; just as, in all outward manifestations, her father had been absolutely without it. Either would, without the vaguest thought of any peculiar virtue or merit in it, have submitted unconsciously to self-extinction on behalf of

the other, none the less for a caress or even definite word of affection never once betraying their mutual dependence in the course of a twelvemonth. In the mere nature of things they appertained to each other, and duty had not detached itself from instinct; had not risen in conscious rebellion, nor arrogated unto itself a conscious martyrdom.

This would not have been especially remarkable, but for the positive nature of their respective intellects and the radical divergence between them. Beyond theological exegesis, the traditional inheritance even to-day of his kind, nothing, out of the material, could penetrate the old borderer : with the solitary exception of theology, there was nothing from which his daughter could not receive intellectual appeal.

How far this was the result of the vicarage intercourse we need not now speculate: that it was considerably so cannot be doubted. The mere fact, however, was not without significance, since, in matters dogmatic, the folk of Windylaw, and Handsel amongst them, had always been staunch in their adherence to the pasturage without the pale of conformity. Nor could the degree of intelligence inferred be other than common property; for mere remoteness of latitude has not of itself been found to argue absence of assertive social incongruities, any more than softening or annihilation of the asperities of confronting creeds, established and disrupt. But the vicarage could not claim the whole of Handsel's enlightenment, for she had been subject to various influences. Her brother

James, for instance, had been both to school and college at Edinburgh, and, so far as was prompted in him, had spoken to her freely. Her cousin Glen from the valley of the Rede water, growing restless, had, as we know, through the offices of Mr. Wanless himself, found a situation at Oxford, and this again had given Handsel an independent correspondence with another artery of the wider life. Thus, much had combined to render her other than the unsophisticated or boorish shepherdess which our fancy so readily, and perhaps exclusively, constructs.

It was as the girl forked fresh fern litter into the cow-brye (dry brown bracken stacked from the previous autumn, and now ruddy in the sun) that her dog jumped up and growled. She was prepared for

the intimation, and left her work to go and meet the comers.

The doctor eyed her curiously, scarce knowing what tone to assume, for all outward signs of her emotion had long since gone. He was a dapper young gentleman with a sandy beard, and was clad in faultless equestrian costume. He permitted the horn of his riding-whip audibly to smite his calf as he entered the cottage, but otherwise his demeanour was comparatively subdued. After placing this same whip with his hat and gloves upon the table, he passed with a professional sniff to the bed which Handsel had disclosed. She withdrew afar off.

'Dead for some hours,' commented the physician, in a low, sententious voice, to Mr. Reid, who stood in contemplation be-

side him. ‘For some hours undoubtedly : four or five hours at least.’

The minister did not dispute it, although the aspect of the other seemed to implore a contradiction. They turned away, and the daughter re-told her brief story, which was received with sympathetic nods.

‘Very sad, very sad ; unfortunately very common in such cases. It is a pity he was so stubborn about the attendant, but it could have made no difference—no difference at all. You must remember that, Miss Gilholme. All has been done. You have my deepest sympathy. Good-bye.’

The elderly pastor remained until the arrival of the dame who was to be the girl’s companion, and, after further ineffectual attempts to induce Handsel to accept his benevolent offer of consolatory

society at the manse, he too took his leave. Solitude still seemed indispensable to her. Contact with any, more especially with such as would feel aggressive compassion to be an inevitable constituent of the situation, would have been intolerably irksome to Handsel. The purely mechanical garrulity of old Mrs. Pringle was not so intolerable, but from this also the young woman soon found it necessary to escape.

The news of David Gilholme's death flew of course rapidly down the valley: amongst the first to receive the information being the inmates of the vicarage. It could scarce cause surprise, whatever other feeling might be inspired, and the principal topic arising from it was inevitably the daughter's future, and incident-

ally the amount of current coin involved. Speculation varied.

Mr. Wanless and his daughter talked of it like the rest, perhaps with a little more responsible perception than many. Ebba's familiarity with Handsel was life-long, having developed by lapse of time from the mere childish combination of common forces into a one-sided conscious attitude of intellectual analysis and speculation. Solid testimony to the moorland girl's intelligence lay, no doubt, in this attitude of Ebba, and in her consequent attempted reconciliation of sundry preconceptions in herself as to intellectual enterprise with an apparently ignoble acquiescence in the negation of it in her subject.

Having learned that Mr. Reid had attended to the girl's necessities, Ebba de-

layed her consolatory visit until the next morning. Then she went in a characteristically informal manner. It chanced that Handsel was just issuing from the cottage on her arrival, and she greeted the visitor in the accustomed manner.

‘I know you don’t want me; but is there anything at all we can do?’

‘Nothing, thank you, Miss Ebba.’

‘You will come down in a few days?’

The other assented, and they seemed about to part; but just then Handsel turned round abruptly.

‘Will you go up with me?’

She pointed to the slope beside them. Ebba turned, scanned her, and acquiesced. The two girls then strode forth in silence.

They presented a suggestive contrast as they climbed the steep slope together.

The muscular development of Handsel was of itself in no way obtrusive, for the proportions were admirably preserved ; none the less, upon first casual glimpse of her, it was the physical completeness which was primarily presented. In Ebba, on the other hand, the trim, lithe, somewhat diminutive corporeality failed wholly to engage attention in face of the keen, inquiring expression of the resolutely-intellectual features. And this outward guise accurately betokened the relative temperaments of the young women. Handsel buoyant, comely, humorous ; of intellect not too deep for unruffled health, fencing with existence, but with foiled weapons and never worsted even at that. Ebba, subtle and daring, armed with the genuine point against mortal assaults of which

her companion knew nothing. Fearless investigation, and alertness in every art of defence sparkled in her dark eye ; and the brow, young and white as it was, betrayed in some mysterious manner the wounds which had been vigorously sustained and surmounted.

They talked little until they were on the summit of the Hawk Knowe, a great round shoulder from which the expanse of the adjacent wilds of hill country were for miles distinctly visible through an air of marvellous transparency. Here they paced to and fro in exalted intercourse, buffeted only by the whistling breezes which came in mad glee ruffling the mountain tops and tearing the shower clouds from their magnetic clutches. In such appropriate atmosphere did the two transcen-

dental maidens discuss their momentous issues, and through it did one at least of them perceive a thrilling sense of liberty to pervade the whole of her conscious system, quickening that reserve force of unconscious endurance to an active influence, surging to wide enterprise and boundless hope. She felt solitude no longer; could regard her silent father down below yonder with complacent stoicism, as one who had definitely achieved, and now as definitely rested. Might she also do as well !

‘ There can be no disrespect to the dead, Handsel, in promoting the nobility of the living. The old sack-cloth and ashes must not avail us now. Let us encounter every blow with an act. The more necessarily so in that we are women, says my brother

Shiel, if you will venture to take him for an authority.'

' I will in that,' said the other, ' for I agree with him, although he yesterday found objection to my building a dike.'

' But you know philosophers have the privilege of being inconsistent. I can forgive him a good deal, seeing that he has written so much sense about us. You shall see what he says; it will interest you. Shall I leave it you now, or another day?'

' Now, certainly,' said Handsel, with alacrity. ' It will do me good. I can feel, but canna always think, and Mr. Shiel aye gives you thoughts. I shall need them with poor James, I doubt.'

' Yes, possibly. But keep to your plain and simple position. You cannot improve

it by any amount of argument. That you are not willing to go into menial service will probably surprise him, but that can't be helped. Your preparation has hitherto been grand,' proceeded Ebba, with enthusiasm. 'Even I, Handsel, have never properly understood it. Oh, how I envy your "toil unsevered from tranquillity!" Cling to that for dear life! If further study endangers that, fling it to the winds, my lass, and come back to us here. We'll herd sheep together. But it won't; it mustn't. Some day, perhaps, I shall join you, and we'll front the world together. Oh, how pugnacious I feel!'

And Ebba laughed and flung out an arm at a curlew that flew whistling past. Handsel who had been glancing at the magazine which had been given to her

thrust it into her pocket, and looked about her.

But they talked until the heavy clouds had gathered, about noon, and then, smothering the fierce glow which had been so ardently fanned in these inspiring altitudes, they dropped, enduring maidens, into the common world below.

CHAPTER VI.

PROSPECTIVE.

IT was already dusk when Glen alighted at the wayside station where her journey ended; her railway journey, that is, for there yet remained some fourteen miles of hilly country between her and her destination, Windylaw. As she looked after her boxes on the silent platform, the one porter of the establishment recognised her beneath a lamp, and greeted her with facetious familiarity.

‘No, I shall stay at the “Bell” to-night,’ she said, coquettishly. ‘Will you take my luggage there?’

She took out her purse thereupon and gave him sixpence.

‘How will you get through to Highsheils from here?’ he asked. ‘You ought to have gone to Rothbury.’

‘I should think I know that,’ was the disdainful answer. ‘I am going to Windylaw, man.’

‘Ou, ay. Ye’ll be through to the funeral, likely.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked the girl in alarm.

‘Have ye no heard?’

‘Heard what? Whose funeral? Tell me quick.’

‘They are to bury David Gilholme the morn, hinny.’

‘You never say it.’

‘It’s as I tell you, my lass. He went tarr’ble sudden at the hinder end.’

The news bewildered Glen for an instant, but no longer. She recovered herself with remarkable alacrity, for as the universe at that period existed but for herself and her requirements, she instinctively saw only how the startling information affected her plans, and a moment was enough to suggest a favourable construction. Her cousin Handsel, then, was alone; this would immeasurably lighten the ordeal,—for with her actual approach to the hill country she perceived that an ordeal there was to be. She felt an acces-

sion of sprightliness, and she sighed forth her ‘Poor man!’ of sympathy with a heartfelt deliverance. She could enter into the discussion with intensity of interest, and when she had procured all the information which the porter could afford her, she tripped away lightly to the seclusion of her inn.

It was only a few minutes’ walk from the station ; but in the dusky stillness of the road the girl felt impelled to stand and regard ecstatically her picturesque surroundings. The cool fragrant breeze from the hills was peculiarly invigorating after her long dusty ride upon the railway, and coming as she did from a sojourn of several months amongst the restraints of civilization. The after-glow in the West, upon which the mysteriously dark-

ening sky seemed to be bearing down impressively, opened out a path of obscure but fascinating freedom to her excited fancy, and as her eye caught a bright star twinkling above the crest of a dark night-cloud it was irresistibly borne in upon her that all the evils which were said to lie in her path were wholly obliterated by this exhilarating independence which they alone could have purchased for her.

At the inn the news was confirmed, so that Glen could build safely upon it. The absence of all ordinary feeling in such a connection was noticeable, but scarcely strange. Death, save of such as custom has made more or less a necessity to us, does not sensibly touch the average teens, and when an interposition of the kind comes so opportunely as positively

to render smoother some difficult path of our own, it were transcendent excess of criticism to frown at the youthful complacency. Glen passed an exceedingly enjoyable evening,—having previous familiarity with the inhabitants of the ‘Bell,’—and even found no occasion for the exercise of inconvenient restraint in such measure of bucolic diversion as a piano can inspire. She was received as a travelled guest, and the advantages which her position afforded were in no way neglected by the young woman herself.

Before her departure the following day, (a shepherd’s cart affording her the desired convenience for the greater part of the way,) Miss Aikenshaw had excogitated as fascinating a programme as fancy could desire. It was, of course, confined to the

delicate recesses of her own bosom, for vivaciously frank as her friends continued to find her, they were to marvel later over the amazingly successful reticence which had all the while been her own.

In the meantime, the sombre ceremony was proceeding in the hills. Rude and primitive as such an observance inevitably was in a locality so rugged, it could present nothing but an aspect of elementary dignity. It was very near the soil, undoubtedly; but an uncontaminated soil, unsuspicuous of ignoble necessities and sordid pains.

The heavens were grey, and all the scene beneath subdued to a sober uniformity of spiritless depression. A raw east wind soughed across the fells, filling a rift here, and obscuring a crest yonder

with the chill vapour of his breath from the North Sea. The mane of the horse which stood harnessed to the cart before the shepherd's door was grey with moisture, and as the animal shook from time to time his doleful acquiescence in the subdued monotone which issued from the quiet cottage, it might have been thought he wept. Even the geese wandered silently, and the bereaved collie, inured somewhat by recent days to the mysterious circumstances, lay in uncertain meditation on the threshold.

At a confused noise of footsteps on the stones within, both horse and dog looked up. As the door opened, the latter slunk aside, and peered from beneath his eyelids at the scene which followed. A man came out, clothed in black except for a

check plaid which enfolded his shoulders, and after throwing his eyes around the hills and giving a glance at his watch, he let down the back of the cart. When he had re-entered, a group came out with a burden, which was placed in the red braken lining the bed of the cart, and very soon the informal procession began. Handsel and her brother James walked behind, accompanied by the minister, Mr. Reid; the half dozen neighbours, shepherds all, and fellow-elders of the kirk with him that was departed, walked in front, engaged in sober converse.

The Presbyterian flock, comprising the bulk of the population in the hills, had no burial-ground appropriated to themselves, so, upon occasions like the present, the vicar, Mr. Wanless, officiated in the grave-

yard of the church. Here the bones of vulgar contention in matters sectarian were not obtruded, owing, no doubt, to the peculiarly human qualifications of the two gentlemen principally concerned. Neither side obtruded their individual idiosyncrasies upon the other, and both could even, upon occasion, combine for common purposes; therefore as Mr. Wanless, despite obvious oddities of temperament well known to all, had in generalities sufficiently proved himself a man of God, it never occurred to anybody that a departed soul would rest less comfortably for being ushered hence by a priest in full canonicals.

‘I wonder what Handsel will do,’ remarked the vicar to his daughter during

an idle moment, before he left his house for the vestry. ‘It is rather awkward for a girl in that position.’

‘I don’t think she will find it so, father. She is a girl of much resource.’

‘Do you think so, Abb? Well, now, that rather surprises me. Of course, I only judge by externals, but I should have thought her a very intelligent girl, without sufficiency of resources. So different from that cousin of hers that we got to Oxford. I cannot fancy Handsel holding positions in a civilized community.’

‘Not dependent positions, certainly,’ said Ebba. And her father looked at her in his vague, meditative way for some seconds, perhaps musing on possible

secondary meanings to his daughter's observation.

'No,' he said at length. 'I suppose she will solve it in the usual way,' he added, with a smile.

'I think not,' replied the girl. 'But look, father, they are in sight.'

The small group of black objects was visible from the window, and the clergyman withdrew.

Ebba still stood to watch the humble procession advance, and from the expression of her face it was obvious that the picturesqueness of the mere spectacle was alone engaging her. Had there been doubt, her further action resolved it. She ran quickly to her room, from the window of which she got an unobstructed prospect, and there, with sketch-book in hand,

she dashed off the suggestion it had made to her. Not until the mourners were at the church gate did she alter her position, then she hurriedly threw on some outdoor things, and went to take her place by the grave.

According to custom, the party afterwards withdrew to the vicarage, there to partake of such simple refreshment as homely circumstances suggested, and the exigencies of mountain travel rendered needful. As they were entering the gateway, Mr. Wanless and his Presbyterian colleague, who walked together, paused, with their eyes in the same direction. A horseman at full trot appeared not far off down the road coming towards them.

‘Mr. Pettipher, I think,’ remarked the minister, and the vicar assented.

The rider was very soon beside them, and he graciously raised his hat, receiving a similar greeting in return.

‘Then I am too late,’ said he, dismounting. ‘I am sorry. I wished to give my farewell to poor David.’

‘It was kind of you, sir,’ replied Mr. Reid, who was gratified by the condescension displayed to one of his flock, and through him to the persuasion at large. ‘We have but just laid him by.’

‘He was my oldest tenant, as you know, Mr. Reid. Indeed, he was the only one remaining that was on the estate when I bought it. But I had a great respect for the *man*. We seem to be losing his kind in these days.’

‘Undoubtedly,’ Mr. Wanless observed.

‘Your opinion, Mr. Pettipher, will greatly gratify his son and daughter.’

‘James is here, I suppose?’

Thereupon they walked up to the house.

A portly gentleman of distinguished appearance was Mr. Pettipher, as became one who wielded proprietary power amongst what constitutes in our day the world of letters. A full English face was his in hue and contour, set off by an ample beard, which was just now additionally grizzled by the mountain mist through which he had ridden. There was nothing at all offensive in his dignified aplomb, for it was more conscious than that of the average successful Briton, and was, moreover, tinged by a very substantial fund of positive good-nature. He

tendered his sympathy to the relatives of the departed with kindness and tact, and after thus acquitting himself he accompanied Mr. Wanless and his daughter to another room, so as to avoid all appearance of imposing restraint upon the general company.

Here they conversed in a friendly manner for some minutes, until the visitor rose to leave. They had hitherto spoken but of generalities of a local or imperial interest ; but, as Mr. Pettipher moved towards the door, he asked with some abruptness what had become of Shiel. The clergyman hesitated, then muttered something about his being called to Oxford. Ebba with some directness confirmed it.

‘ A striking paper that of his in “ Wargent’s,” ’ remarked the gentleman, looking

at Ebba with a twinkle. ‘Have you seen it?’

‘I have, and think it much to the point.’

‘You do?’ laughed the other, as he went into the hall.

That was all he said about it.

The vicar accompanied Mr. Pettipher to the gate. As they went down, Ebba saw that they were talking. When her father returned, he seemed in very contemplative mood. He caught his daughter as she was about to go into the dining-room.

‘One word first, Abb . . . Mr. Pettipher makes an amazing suggestion.’

Then the clergyman stopped, and looked absently into the young lady’s face.

‘About Shiel, father?’ she hazarded.

‘Yes, indirectly. That debt I told you about: the thousand pounds. He wants to make Shiel a present of it.’

The girl had not known before that Mr. Pettipher was the accommodator; but it did not surprise her.

‘It is remarkably kind of him,’ said she.

‘Well, it is; but—but I hardly like it. It rather resembles charitable education, doesn’t it?’

‘Surely not. One can take as well as give gracefully.’

‘But surely the boy will never take it!’ exclaimed the vicar, with accession of energy.

‘That is Sam Johnson with the boots,’ laughed Ebba. ‘I think it a false philosophy. The instinct is too natural,

but it ought to be resisted. It is savage.'

'Of course, it does not lie with Shiel,' continued Mr. Wanless, apparently following out his own reflections rather than responding to his daughter. 'The debt is my own, and I certainly could not accept it. No . . . but come, Nabbs, we must go in to them.'

'But, father, you will hardly refuse—'

'Come, come,' he said, impatiently, taking her arm; and they went to the other room.

Here they found eager conversation proceeding; Mr. Duncan Anderson, the shepherd from Herdlaw, bringing his vernacular harangue upon predestination to an abrupt close upon the vicar's entrance. In less abstruse matters Mr. Wanless took an affable part; Ebba, who watched him curi-

ously, thinking an unusually impulsive part. The considerate behaviour of Mr. Pettipher served as a convenient, uncompromising topic, and it consequently received exhaustive attention until Mr. Reid gave the signal for departure by offering his hand to his clerical friend, and with it the customary thanks for their reception. Thereupon plaids and over-coats were donned, and with mutual civilities the assembly dispersed.

When alone, the vicar drew his daughter just within the library doorway.

'Do you know anything of Shiel's movements, Abb?' he asked, this being the first reference since the youth's departure.

'I think he is at Oxford.'

'In connection with that matter?'

‘ Oh, no, father.’

‘ Then I must see him. We cannot leave things indefinite any longer. Will you send my wishes to him ?’

‘ Certainly ; I will write at once. But I fear it will only aggravate the situation. He is evidently working at literature, and it is quite possible that he will make a living at that.’

‘ So he thinks ; so I thought. It is a fatal delusion. Do you suppose he is doing anything definite ? Any connection with Mr. Pettipher, for instance ?’

‘ I can’t say that I do.’

‘ Then, Ebba, summon him here. I must do my duty to him. I have been remiss enough.’

Mr. Reid, after promising to ride up

later to Windylaw, took the road with Duncan Anderson, and they would scarcely fail to improve the stretch of paces which lay in common for them. James Gilholme and his sister Handsel, on the other hand, walked up the valley in nearly unbroken silence. The monotonousplash of the stony burn, and the clear whistle of a startled dipper, or the cry of some distant moorland bird, was all the audible accompaniment to their unspoken thoughts.

It was a wild path this up into the hills before it reposed in the green secluded cup in which the Linnburn had its rise. For some distance, in the middle part, it traversed a narrow haugh, gorse sprinkled, whilst immediately opposite, with only the narrow stream between, rose a rocky precipice with rowan-trees in its crevices,

and a fringe of birch, sloe, and willow-bushes at the top. In border feuds, doubtless, no band of moss-troopers would have been unwary enough to take the lower track ; but in later days degenerate utility asserts its claims securely, and the two mourners walked below.

The height above was the point that their cousin Glen had reached some half-hour before, and at which she had resolved to pause and reconnoitre. She had watched from a distance the group in the church-yard, then at the vicarage ; and now, with palpitating satisfaction, relieved from the numerous disquieting contingencies which had been inevitably suggested, she beheld the brother and sister appear alone below. Once fully assured of this, her tactics were altered, and physically weary as she

was, for she had already trudged a long five miles, she broke into a hurried pace, so as to reach the house before them.

They were still some distance from the house when Handsel remarked upon the bawling of the geese. The combined clamour of a score of these animals will startle the grouse for miles amongst the hills, and perhaps no other natural sound, certainly none which is peculiar to the moorland, can be guaranteed to travel so far. The yell of discordant resonance, appalling in its blatancy, triumphs by sheer violence of contrast. The whistle of a curlew is clear and can travel far; the hoarse piping of a grouse is resonant enough; the ‘stoor quaick quaick’ of the wild-duck circling the lough is a powerful basso and effective in itself; but all these

by very reason of their harmony are limited in their circuit. In reality, they travel farther than the ear can accurately determine, for many of their latest vibrations are only apparently lost, merged in the plaintive unison which is the natural breathing of the hills, and thus undistinguishable as individual elements. But the uproar of a goose Wherewith amongst moorland music shall this brazen falsetto blend?

The persistency of the noise surprised Handsel, for her experienced ear detected at once exceptional cause ; but as a fringe of alder-trees lined the burn here, and lay between her and the house, nothing could be determined. Not until they emerged upon the open vale beyond was the situation made clear.

About a hundred yards before them was a female figure fleeing impetuously hither, with the whole flock of geese yelling and flapping their wings in full chase behind. The young minister looked up in grave astonishment, and soberly questioned his companion. James, a young man of twenty-two, was the typical thin, pale youth in whom as yet the saintly attainments have not adjusted themselves to the modest human proportions ; and although doubtless by virtue of his calling he had acquired a mastery over his demonstrative emotions, and had displayed a resigned composure throughout the proceedings of the day, nobody would be in danger of suspecting him of levity. Even now his gravity was equal to the occasion. With Handsel it was otherwise, for to her

there appeared something so irresistibly ludicrous in the spectacle that, day of mourning or no, she must abandon herself to the resonant comment of unrestrained laughter. She laughed and laughed, unable to pay any heed to the impatient remonstrance of her brother, whose only anxiety was to learn the practical bearings of the unlooked-for situation.

‘Why, do you see, Handsel?’ he exclaimed at length, blushing deeply as he made the announcement. ‘It is cousin Glen.’

The other looked, sobered by the astonishing assertion, then quietly acquiesced. Soon they met.

The circumstances of their encounter gave the visitor a favourable opportunity of ignoring what she knew must be the

attitude of her relatives. She sank, panting, into Handsel's arms, claiming refuge from the geese, and amidst more or less hysterical ejaculations they reached the house.

' Well, Robin, you're now masterless,' said James, having entered, in a tone of somewhat professional condolence to the dog that had slunk in with equal gravity after him. ' What will we do with you, my mannie? You'll like the flitting as badly as any of us.'

He turned to invite, with a languid smile, the comment of his companions, and then found that, except for the dog, he was in the room alone. The slight flush, though, which at the instant had overspread his pallid features, remained there, and there was a nervous play of the

muscles around his lips as he glanced with furtive expectancy towards the door. The girls not immediately following, with alacrity Mr. Gilholme unlocked a drawer and took out those papers which his sister had found as the last earthly object of their father's attention.

'And what on earth brings you here, my lass?' demanded Handsel, when she and her visitor had drawn away from the house.

'Han'sel, I ought not to have come by you at such a time,' replied Glen. 'You don't want me, of course, and you wish me at the bottom of the burn, as I often do myself,—I ken nicely, now; but look, hinny, will you just have me beside you for two-three days? Don't look so glowering, Han'sel; don't.'

It was true that the robuster cousin did scrutinize her fragile companion with disconcerting directness, an effect in no degree lessened by the resolute silence which she kept.

‘Has Mr. Shiel Wanless told you anything?’ continued Glen, with alacrity.

‘Told me anything?’

‘About me?’

‘What should he know of you?’

‘In my place, I mean.’

‘He has told me nothing.’

‘Then let me stay, Han’sel. I’ll tell you everything when James has gone. He’ll no stay long, will he?’

‘But I’m not going to live here now. What would I do with the place alone? We shall sell it up.’

‘Ay, ay, after a bit. Dinna drive me

out,—will you no, Han'sel? You were aye good to me, and I need your kindness now.'

There was a power of appeal in Glen's pretty face which her cousin was not slow in discerning or construing.

'I'll no drive you from the door, my lass, of course. But why did you no gang home?'

Glen whimpered something about her father, and then wept outright. Handsel of course saw the whole predicament at once, and despite her inevitable impatience at such a complexity she felt a ready compassion for the foolish little victim, and rose immediately to the necessities of the case.

'Well, well, dinna greet,' she said, more kindly than anything hitherto. 'Come

away and we'll see what we can do.'

When Glen was in some measure composed they went in to the house.'

'Glen is out of her place, James,' was Handsel's simple announcement, 'and she came here without knowing. But we can manage for to-night.'

'Why, certainly.'

'Thank you, James,' muttered the culprit from behind, and slipped away again.

As a matter of conscience James had refrained from all reference to his father's material affairs until after the funeral, so that he now invited his sister to the looked-for conference. He thought they might discuss their position together before the arrival of Mr. Reid, who was appointed executor, to which Handsel readily agreed.

The brief statement of affairs was to the effect, that there was some fifteen hundred pounds, to which present flocks had to be added, left to be equally divided between them,—an amount at which both son and daughter confessed their supreme astonishment.

‘But what is the matter with poor Glen?’ interposed James, irrelevantly. ‘She doesn’t look so well as she used to.’

‘Oh, nothing. You know what a restless body she is. She wants something new, I suppose.’

‘Yes, yes; I feared she was ill—that’s all. Well, father wishes . . . I need hardly say, Handsel, that I shall not call half the money mine, for I am amply provided for by my work, and I shall in a year or two, of course, have much more.

But as we shall live together, we need not discuss that at present. I only mention the matter at all to ask you, if you do not agree with me, that it will be far the best to just leave the money in its present investments and put the interest to our joint household expenses ?'

Hansel was looking down and did not immediately answer to this suggestion.

' It brings between sixty and seventy pounds a-year now,' continued James, ' and the two or three hundred pounds there will be to add to it will increase it a little.'

' I understand a' your feelings, James,' at length replied the girl, with a little nervous abruptness, ' and how kind you are; but you ken that we are different in many things. I had far better go my own

way. The thirty or forty pounds a-year which will be my share will give me plenty to live upon.'

'But how—what do you mean, Handsel?' stammered the minister of twenty-two.

This obtuseness in him was enough to stimulate the girl, and her spirit of the Hawk Knowe instantly inspired her.

'Forget that I wear petticoats, my lad, and you'll understand what I mean well enough. I must away to the town for a-while, and have my turn at books and learning. There is a great deal in the world that I dinna yet properly understand, and I'm not content to pass through my life without having a spier at it.'

She was now standing to her full height, and presenting her stately figure to his astonished gaze.

‘But do you mean that you wish to go and live in a town alone?’

‘That is exactly what I mean, Jamie. Do you see any objection to it?’

‘You cannot know what towns are, dear lass,’ he pursued, with genuine anxiety. ‘A young woman is liable to all sorts of——’

‘I know that the law protects a woman there as well as here,’ was Handsel’s dignified rejoinder; ‘and for the rest, one is as near one’s self in the town as in the country.’

A brief silent scrutiny seemed to convince the bewildered minister of his powerlessness before her. He knew that he had ever been powerless before her. Some instinct restrained him from direct religious argument, such as with another he would

no doubt have immediately adopted, and in any other line he did not feel particularly efficient.

' You cannot possibly have any objection, Jamie. Surely you know me well enough for that.'

' No, no, of course not. It does not lie with me. I have no thoughts but for your welfare.'

As a tacit confession of the hopelessness of the argument James took up a book, and Handsel went out to seek refuge in some mechanical employment.

She found Glen prostrate under the rick of fern, immersed in tears. For no clearly defined reason, the intrepid wanderer had, during the few moments she had been alone, felt supremely miserable. The necessity for self-control being no longer

imperative, her strength had given out, and she had flung herself in the fern to weep. Handsel, coming from an interview which had irritated her, chanced to be in no accommodating mood for this. She scanned the slight figure before her from head to foot, then sternly demanded what was wrong with her.

‘Cold and wretched,’ sobbed the distressed one.

‘Ye’ll be het enough afore ye’ve done,’ was the merciless response. ‘What for do you come to travel through the moss in boots like yon? You’re no on your pavements here, ye ken. You’re as wet as a peat, lass. Come away.’

This imperious mood seemed to work the desired effect, for Glen leaped up with alacrity, and was conducted forthwith into

the house. It took but a few minutes for Handsel to get ready a bucket of hot water, thrust the damp, cold feet into it, and finally put her patient bodily to bed. Glen slept before her nurse had left the room.

‘Then she *is* ill,’ said James, pale and anxious, as Handsel came out from her Samaritan labours.

‘Well she may be,’ was the reply, ‘if she’ll wear such trash as this in the place of boots.’

The articles in question were thrust forward for his inspection, and the minister took the little things, sodden and muddy, into his own hands and regarded them with close attention and gravity.

‘They are what she wore in the town, of course,’ was his ultimate apology.

‘They are not sufficient for these wet hills.’

‘I dinna think they are,’ said Handsel, with peculiar dryness.

When she had done what was needful, she again went out.

CHAPTER VII.

HEAD AND TAIL.

WHEN all was silent, James reverted to his book, but soon exchanged it for the testamentary papers which his father had left. Even these could not engage him undividedly for many minutes, and he looked out of the window idly. All was still a sullen grey there, and the light patter of the burn alone broke the universal silence. Then the bark of Handsel's dog came from some little distance,

and a single goose answered it. In the quiet succeeding, the minister sank into a reverie.

He was aroused from this by a light cry from the room adjoining. Having been so entirely absorbed in thought, he listened for its repetition, in case his imagination had deceived him. The sound was repeated, a scarcely articulate cry, and he hastened to the door. He called Glen by name twice, but got no answer. Pausing for an instant, the young man glanced around him, then softly raised the latch. The door opened noiselessly. The face of the girl was conspicuous on the pillow. Lovely in its flush, the eyes closed fast in sleep, and the small, rosy lips just pouting naturally. Thus convinced of her security, the minister, with a blush as deep as that

of the sleeper, turned away from the door, but did not at once close it. The next moment he was a-tiltœ in the room, his eyes bending tenderly over the sleeping figure. His own lips were apart with nervous awe at the sight which ravished him, and his features motionless. Only he himself could hear the beating of his heart, but in his ears it drowned all else. Suddenly he laid his lips to the sheets which, like a flowing billow, circled her chin, and to his horror she moved and uttered a muffled cry. He started up, and, seeing that she dreamed only, fled without sound from the room.

After that, James thrust on his hat and paced the greensward outside the house. He was still there when Mr. Reid came, late in the afternoon, to discuss testa-

mentary matters, and the perturbation of his own current of thought prevented his detecting anything unusual in his friend's features.

' You are right, Mr. Reid,' he hastened to exclaim. ' My sister has propounded a most amazing course of conduct.'

The nervous unsettlement of the younger man was apparent enough in his ejaculatory and impulsive manner.

' Come inside. All the papers are, of course, in admirable order, and you are appointed executor.'

' One moment, James.'

The tone of Mr. Reid's voice caused James to look suddenly back in anxious surprise.

' Are you ill, Mr. Reid ?'

' I have bad news—distressing news it

must be under the peculiar circumstances. Mr. Pettipher has met with a very serious accident.'

James's brow lightened.

' After leaving us ?'

' Evidently on his way from us. As Duncan Anderson was returning over the Rook Edge, after we had parted, he found the poor gentleman lying in the moss sadly injured. The horse was not to be seen, but the rider, it seemed, must have been dragged for some distance in the stirrup.'

' Shocking indeed. But no danger, I trust ?'

' To be sure I trust not, but it was reported to me as very serious. The gentleman was unconscious, so that nothing can yet be certainly known of the acci-

dent. It has quite upset me, James.'

Whilst the two gentlemen still talked of this disquieting addition to the day's depressions, Handsel joined them; not unnaturally, as she approached, construing their looks of extraordinary gravity into a comment upon her own revolutionary behaviour. It was this, no doubt, which impelled her to assume an attitude of unusual independence, in prospect of the approaching interview: the few words with her brother having convinced her of the hopelessness of conciliatory methods. The unexpected disclosure, however, necessarily checked her action, and she entered sympathetically into the topic of conversation, until Mr. Reid paternally took the arms of his two charges and led them into the house.

' His ways are inscrutable, Jamie,' said he, gravely, in doing so, ' and our only duty is to bow the head submissively. Our lights are sma', sma'.'

Glen, who had slept soundly, was aroused by the steps and voices, and in her state of semi-consciousness leapt up in alarm. But a momentary glance around her and a glimpse of the grey hill-side without brought her speedy reassurance, and she composed herself into as luxurious an attitude as was possible in Handsel's feather-bed. From that snug security she looked forth complacently upon the colder world.

In the adjoining room, too, a certain amount of comfort was being established. A becoming gravity still characterised all the features, but Handsel moved about

with a certain deliberate alacrity which was perhaps significant. She mended the great fire, pulled forth her father's arm-chair for the elder minister and asked him if he would take anything. But Mr. Reid was not of the fleshly inclined. He declined the proffered hospitality, and, instead of sitting in the chair, he knelt at it; the others, immediately acquiescing, also took appropriate situations. The two or three words followed in a tone of deep and unaffected sincerity. Then the three took their seats.

Mr. Reid took the will and read it aloud, to the effect with which we are already acquainted. Then the items of the estate were gone through, commendatory comments from the elder being interspersed and the admirable parental

example duly enforced. Then the gentleman emphasized, needlessly as he admitted, the interest he took in his two young friends' future, and the manner in which that important future was to be spent. That of one of them by divine grace was marked out pretty clearly, and would no doubt in due course have its adequate reward: that of the other was more open to question, and would require their most earnest and prayerful regard. Was Handsel conscious of any definite predilection?

At this James shaded his brow with one arched hand and kept his eyes to the floor.

Handscl did not hesitate to admit that she was, and Mr. Reid's kindly face was raised in patient inquiry.

'So long as my father was alive I never had any doubt of my duty,' remarked the girl, with distinctness.

'Now that he is gone things are quite changed. I am going to study for a year or two in the town.'

The minister nodded a benign acquiescence: James blushed and moved his feet.

'That is the whole of my plan, Mr. Reid.'

'It is a wide one, Handsel, and one which requires particular consideration——'

'I have explained myself to James,' continued the young woman, 'and I am afraid what he disapproves of will hardly be pleasing to you; but you know, Mr. Reid, there are two opinions to a' things,

and I dare say about women we should not just exactly agree.'

'But we agree upon what is right and wrong, my dear lassie.'

'Certainly we do.'

Therewith Mr. Reid propounded at full length the traditional generalities to which James had proved unequal. Handsel heard him with patience, and as calmly responded.

'That only proves what I said,' smiled she. 'You do not consider that *we* ought to be individuals, Mr. Reid; I do. The brain's a brain; the heart's a heart; and the hand's a hand; whether it be set to the form of a man or a woman. I canna see any law of God which prevents a woman using her hand or her brain as

well as a man, if she have a free opportunity of doing so, and be so minded.'

'By no means: by no means. In modesty and discretion, that is.'

'And I hope I'll not exceed either,' exclaimed Handsel, more warmly.

'I canna think you will. I do not see, James, that we can have any objection to this course. We have friends enough in Edinburgh who will take a care of Handsel—'

'I shall go first to London, Mr. Reid,' she interposed.

'My lass, my lass!'

Even the good old minister succumbed to this, and the debate immediately assumed a more animated aspect. Every manner of persuasion and entreaty was brought to bear upon the infatuated

maiden, with such solemnity of application indeed that Handsel's patience was at last exhausted, and she brought the interview to an abrupt termination by withdrawing from the field.

So angry had she grown that, for some moments, instant flight seemed the only outlet for her excited energies. She paced to and fro beside the fern rick, planning her random departure with impetuous resentment, and a rebellious disregard for the most ordinary precautions of practical experience. The sudden recollection of her cousin Glen brought an abrupt check, and in face of it she attained to a more collected vein of reflection. Having promised her a shelter, immediate flight was at any rate out of the question.

Now it chanced that Glen herself, re-

posing in that chamber adjoining, had inevitably overheard the bulk of the conversation which had passed between Handsel and the ministers, and at this moment she lay there contemplating its issues. That her cousin Handsel, always hitherto cited as the pink of propriety, should propose an independent pilgrimage to the great metropolis, offered fascinations in itself to one of any enterprising propensities ; but what perhaps appealed with a still more irresistible potency was the cogent reflections of her cousin upon the topic of female independence in general. Of late even Glen herself had begun strongly to suspect that this same independence was a matter of much moment, but, in her inexperience, she had with over-sensitive scrupulosity hidden such as

effrontery in the recesses of her own bosom, regarding it as a peculiarly petted bit of sinfulness, only to be gloated over in the darkest of secrecy. Here, upon fleeing in dire humiliation to the recesses of orthodoxy, was she to find herself suddenly supported in this beloved heresy by no less an authority than Handsel herself, and that in the teeth of two ordained pillars of the kirk. Extremes, we know, meet, and, moreover, to the indiscriminating sense, very frequently appear identical. If Glen fell again to sleep with a recovered even a redoubled consciousness of dignity, it were scarce matter for surprise.

When she next awoke it was dusk, but she could see Handsel move beside the window.

‘Has Mr. Shiel been here?’ was her

scarce voluntary ejaculation ; but instantly correcting herself, admitted she had been dreaming.

‘ Well, do you feel better, lass ? ’

‘ Oh, ay, I’m fine,’ came in brisk response. ‘ Has Mr. Reid gone ? ’

‘ Mr. Reid—what do you know about him ? ’

‘ I woke up once and heard them talking ; and you, Han’sel,’ added Glen, with insinuating archness. ‘ I didn’t want to, but really I couldn’t help it. But never mind, old girl, you gave it ’em fine. I could have died with laughing.’

‘ H’m. Are you going to get up again ? ’

‘ Now you’re not cross, are you, because I’ll stay here if you are.’

‘ You’d better get up. We shall have

time to talk of other things in a day or two.'

Glen leapt from bed, and intercepted her cousin before she had reached the doorway.

' You shan't go until you promise to be friends. How could I help hearing? I didn't listen at the door. And what does it matter? You only said what I have always thought myself. Why should they have everything to themselves ?'

Hansel made no direct response.

' Get dressed,' was all she said to it.

' Tell me what's the matter with you.'

' Ha'd away, you little gowk. James is in the other room, ye ken.'

' I believe you're jealous,' snapped Glen, and the other departed.

The evening was not a particularly easy

one. James's efforts to be frankly agreeable to his two companions, and they to each other, were but moderately successful, so that ultimately each relapsed into some individual kind of employment. Glen withdrew herself early.

When Handsel came in to her she was still awake, so that when they were side by side, conversation was naturally resumed. Perhaps darkness was deemed desirable for the topic.

'And, pray, why do you believe I'm jealous?' asked Handsel, superciliously.

'I believe you are.'

'Of whom, hinny?'

'How can I say? Mr. Sheil, likely.'

It flashed across Handsel that this name had been before on her visitor's lips, and she became curious.

‘What on earth has Mr. Sheil got to do with the matter?’

‘I ken nicely that he is a friend of yours, lass.’

‘Certainly he is. Is he of yours?’

‘But for him I’d have no been here.’

Hansel was silent for an instant, then exploded.

‘I dinna believe you. Go to sleep and don’t make a little fool of yourself.’

There was an inarticulate grumble, and they talked no more.

For all that, it is scarcely to be supposed that they immediately slept. Hansel, with the glowing enthusiasm of those printed utterances of Shiel’s still about her, was thunderstruck by the malicious audacity of her cousin. A senseless little butterfly she had not unnaturally con-

sidered her, and had, no doubt, greatly on that account been so ready to shield her from the direst penalty of her heedless frivolities; but that the gay flutterings could so effectually hide the venom of the wasp, Handsel had never before for an instant suspected; and that it was other than venom, no faintest instinct of hers could so much as hint to her.

With whatever innocence Glen had originally made her remark, no doubt her silent acquiescence in the impression which she had unintentionally imparted, and which could not but be obvious enough even to her limited capacity, justified Handsel's reprobation. When she first perceived it, Glen was frightened, and her tongue trembled with the explanatory confession, but some subtle influence re-

strained her, and she could not get it uttered. Each moment thereafter confirmed her silence.

Shiel's behaviour had indeed genuinely touched her, and ever since their encounter on Magdalen Bridge, she had harboured and clung to the image of him with a sense of peculiar property. He had crossed her path at a critical moment, and saved her from what, despite her frivolity, might have been serious enough. This had instinctively aroused in her the sense of possession, and in a nature such as hers the combative resentment of sharing it with anyone. Handsel, she was fully aware, was in this connection a subject to be feared, so that, after all, this unintentional stroke of villainy would do unexpected service.

But Glen had miscalculated her cousin's character. It happened, in the course of the next morning—the two girls had scarce exchanged a word in the interval,—that unexpectedly they encountered. Glen, as it seemed, was fleeing from the house, and came upon Handsel by the byre. The former was flushed before the meeting, and those critical eyes did not compose her. James, seeing the dilemma, retreated in the opposite direction.

'Come away here, Glen.' A little way off they stood. Handsel looked with disconcerting directness into the pretty face. 'How long do you want to stay here?'

'Only a week or two,' was the pouting response.

'Very good. I'm content to stay with

you. We can put off the sale for a bit. But—stay, Glen—you'll not stop here with a lie on your lips. I dinna want to ken any of your secrets, but this yae thing you shall tell me. Did Mr. Shiel Wanless bring you to this ?'

' No, he didn't.'

' Then how dare you tell me that he did ?' cried Handsel, indignantly.

' I didn't mean that. But he did more than he that did it would have done,' retorted Glen, in a flush of self-defence. ' He took me to his own house, and gave me his own bed, when I'd a mind to have found one in the river. That's what he did. He said that he thought none the waur o' me for what I'd done, and he made me promise that I'd come down here, and he gave me money to come wi'. That's

what he did. Isn't it true that but for him I'd no have been here? And he's been kinder to me than anybody else in the whole world, except—except your ain dear self, Han'sel.'

And with this wholly unexpected turn to her exclamation, Glen clasped her cousin's neck and wept there.

CHAPTER VIII.

PHILOSOPHY AT ISSUE.

IT was the day after the funeral that Shiel was to reach Linnbrig, in accordance with his letter to Mr. Pettipher, and a brief note also which he had despatched to his sister Ebba. He was wholly ignorant of what was proceeding there, for the letter sent to him did not arrive until after his departure. He travelled therefore in the state of aggressive enthusiasm to which he had arrived since his brief return to Oxford.

Mr. Wanless chanced to take in the letter which Shiel had addressed to his sister, and he went with it in person to Ebba's room, where she was engaged with brush and palette. She instantly saw the letter in his hand, but looked away. Her father glanced at her picture with the careless good-humour of a parent towards the handiwork of his offspring.

'Your patience is exemplary, Nabbs. You will be an artist at last. What is it?'

'A mere phantasy—the Erl-King,' said the girl, getting up. 'A letter, father?'

'For you, from Shiel, apparently. It can hardly be an answer.'

Ebba took the letter and tore it open. Mr. Wanless turned again to her picture, as she hastily scanned the pages.

'He is coming back for a day or two . . . and will be here this afternoon.'

'H'm.'

'To talk with Mr. Pettipher is his principal reason.'

'Mr. Pettipher . . . of course, he doesn't know of this dreadful affair.'

Mr. Wanless turned slowly and left the room.

The clergyman passed that morning restlessly in his library, unable to read, unable to devote sustained attention to anything. A lingering hope had assailed him that Shiel had recovered his reason, and that Lord Purbeck's offer was accepted, so that the disappointment of the letter affected him with whetted keenness. That Shiel was to be lured into degrada-

tion by the tempting munificence of their wealthy acquaintance also occurred to him, and, clergyman though he was, it wrought in him a tremulous revolt. This awakened a sense of the whole of his past weakness in him, and it oppressed him insufferably. Why had he deemed, or rather, why had he by a too urgent persuasion been led to deem, a university education so essential? If he could have given it, well; as he could not, what could such dishonourable gain possibly end in but vexation and disillusionment? What, indeed, had it done for himself? Imparted a sensibility to the highest refinements of an intellectual existence, certainly, but with a prohibitive banishment and wages inferior to those of many a mechanic for the indulgence of it. Nay,

was not this extraordinary development of his son the direct outcome of the rottenness of the system? Educated honestly, to such limit as the paternal possessions would warrant, and the susceptible casuist could not but suppose that he himself, and after him his son, would have fallen harmoniously into the ordinances of the universe, if so far only as they might be exemplified in sheep-herding on the mountains.

In the afternoon Shiel appeared, walking in through the garden-gate as though returning from shooting. The vicar was on the grass at the time, so the two met and shook hands formally.

‘So Mr. Pettipher is dead,’ said Shiel, abruptly.

‘Never, Shiel!’

‘So they told me at the lodge, and the blinds were down.’

‘You had not seen him, then?’

‘No,’ said Shiel, eyeing his father.

‘Had—had he made any proposal to you?’

‘Not directly. I came to talk with him.’

‘His intention dies with him, no doubt.’

‘Undoubtedly.’ And Shiel went in.

Ebba found her brother unusually loquacious as she sat with him at the table; she having received his news in reflective silence. Since the opportunity was dashed from him, of course Shiel had become irrevocably convinced that it had offered the only path possible to him for an existence. Ebba was not so sure of it, and was evidently intent upon impressing her conviction upon her brother.

‘The customary sarcasm of fate,’ said Shiel, devouring his viands.

‘Was it a definite offer of journalistic work?’

‘Certainly not. I should hope he knew his man better.’

‘But that must have been his object. Was there anything more?’

‘I might through it have found utterance for very much that I have to say.’

‘Did he offer you any money?’

‘What on earth do you mean, Abb?’ Her placid smile restrained his violence.

‘I should hardly have thought your views sufficiently practical for contemporary journalism.’

‘If you mean for the promotion of contemporary commercial abominations, they are not practical,’ roared the catalyst.

‘But I suppose there is something also practical in the asseveration of the essential truth of things.’

‘Possibly; but we have voted such essential truth purely a matter of speculative opinion. In practical journalism you will have to begin somewhat nearer the surface, I fancy.’

‘That is as I please.’

‘Precisely,—as also your editors.’

For some time he ate and drank in silence.

‘Father is anxious to speak with you again of the rascal counters,’ Ebba remarked presently. ‘He used the ominous words, “something definite.” I thought it as well to prepare you.’

‘Very good: I am prepared.’

Ebba had, after strenuous mental debate,

resolved not to tell him of the debt. That her father would not she was now assured. If the whole of the young lady's mind were to be confessed, she did not entirely find cause for regret in this action of her brother's. Her extensive literary ambitions on his behalf were lifelong, and it would doubtless have been every bit as painful to her to contemplate an average commercial existence for him as ever it was for Shiel himself; but a certain amount of practical necessity she admitted, which her brother did not.

‘With anything definite?’

‘Definite according to the gospel of degradation,—no. I have found no reason to modify my contention.’

‘But you beg the whole question of mere existence. The fates seem to decree

that in our universe at any rate the breath shall be dependent upon, say a minimum ten shillings weekly; is there any sublimated method of acquiring these?’

‘Have I to go again through the alphabet with you? You know that I repudiate the responsibility of acquiring them. When I am ruffian enough to impose an existence upon anyone, tyrant enough to fling conscious hostages to a diabolical fortune, I will meet my liabilities. Until then I am not aware of any.’

‘You speak of Glen Aikenshaw,’ suggested Ebba. ‘What of her?’

‘I suppose you know now. Hasn’t she come?’

‘I have not heard.’

‘Then you must go this afternoon to see. The little criminal!’

'That, too, a case of hostages, I suppose.'

'The little idiot!' cried Shiel. 'She ought to be thrashed; the other—shot. Come, let us go. I'll walk with you.' And he got up and threw his chair back.

They were soon on the track by the burnside, tramping buoyantly between the hills. The atmosphere, clear and cold, dispelled for the nonce all speculative topics. The very face of Shiel was changed. The ruffle of intellectual contest which the mere vicinity of human action inevitably impressed on him, was stamped out to the smoothness of the sky or water, and he seemed but a part of the rugged freedom of the scene around. In this locality he could for a moment even divest himself of his very consciousness, and identify him-

self, as it were, with the inanimate buoyancy of things.

At a linn beneath the steepest part of the brae, he threw himself down and dispatched Ebba to the house alone. Very soon, with his back in a crevice of the rock, he was lulled by the constant plunge of the burn into a poetic reverie.

That morning had witnessed the issue between Glen and Handsel, not without consequence to both the participants in it. The mere encounter which occasioned it had been immediately brought about by the young minister James, unintentionally enough. His attitude to Glen in times past had never been disguised ; but if remembered by the young woman mainly affected by it, no doubt it had been long considered as wholly a thing of the past.

When therefore she had been confronted, under circumstances so perplexing, by professed tenderness from her old lover, she could only receive it by hurried and shamefaced flight from his presence. He, discomfited, had wandered away from the house.

When Glen had sufficiently recovered from her emotion she left Handsel and went in. The latter watched her with a mingled sense of tenderness and impatience until she was hidden in the doorway, then went about more work. But Handsel could not easily dispose of the subject which had been so forcibly thrust upon her. The ludicrousness of connecting Shiel Wanless with any of the tender perceptions was obvious enough to her, nevertheless such incongruous considera-

tion did engage her a good deal in the course of the morning.

The impassioned talk with her cousin had brought the figure of Shiel very vividly to the mind of Glen, and as she sat brooding alone by the cottage-window she felt a tremulous delight in contemplating it, and, as it were, sheltering herself by its ample presence, to the defiance of the orthodox world. How many men, and young men, would have done all this for her, and in such a manner as he had done? It is hardly strange if, in the ill-regulated wandering of her feelings (for of intellect she had surely not any,) Glen travelled extraordinary and unjustifiable distances. With a wholly disinterested philosophy she was scarcely likely to have much acquaintance.

In the midst of her reflections she was seized with a virtuous impulse, and she set about some of the lighter household occupations. Despite her irritable exterior to Handsel, she was, in her way, grateful for the kindness which had been shown to her, and was under the impression that she was not willing to be exclusively a burden. The exercise of broom and duster seemed an earnest of her virtue, and she soon struck the most excellent terms with herself. She did her work thoroughly enough, omitting none of the corners, moving this or that that seemed necessary, and gathering zeal as she proceeded. She took down all the books from the dresser, and dusting them one by one replaced them. She even gave a glance at the names of them, but with the majority in-

quired no further. One or two she opened and lingered a moment over the pages. At the bottom of all was the number of that American monthly which Ebba had left. Owing no doubt to its paper exterior, Glen glanced also at this; and almost immediately her eye fell upon a name on the back which sent an extraordinary thrill through her system.

She looked around her in a singularly guilty manner, and hastily flung down her duster. When she had been to the door, to assure herself of privacy, she threw herself into a chair, and with flushed cheeks and eyes aglow she began to devour Shiel's article. A tough enough morsel she found it; but as she proceeded, her small rosy lips audibly articulating the periods, she seemed to gather some thread, and a con-

scious enthusiasm fired her. Some sentences she could wholly appropriate, and they alone struck the note of her reading. It was enough indeed that the subject was woman and the freedom of her, and that *he* was the champion of the sex. What recked she that it was the very antithesis of passion,—nay, how much could she understand of this negation? That a man could write enthusiastically of woman could mean but one thing surely, however paradoxical his expression; and this one thing she naturally appropriated to herself. What if Handsel had got all her impulse from this same fountain? She should not have him,—no, she should not, was the inaudible shriek of Glen's nature as she shut up the pages, and hid them away beneath the pile from which she had

unearthed them. But oh, it was hard to think tenderly of Handsel.

The circumstances of the trio were enough warrant for a marked reticence towards one another, and except at the inevitable meal they kept parted. In the course of the afternoon Glen was startled by the appearance of Ebba, and succeeded in making good her escape, without suffering a dreaded encounter.

Shiel still sat dreaming beside the water ; the noise of the fall effectually restricting his world, had he needed it. Between him and the edge of the stream but a few feet of grassy bank intervened, and it was upon this space that, without the slightest warning, the figure of a girl was presented to his gaze. Inevitably for an instant he

mistrusted his vision and leapt up. Glen feigned surprise at the encounter and turned to disappear. But an imperious summons recalled her.

‘You found things hardly as we expected. What are you going to do?’ said he, after disposing of his astonishment.

‘We are going to stay at Windylaw,’ was her reply, as she coloured deeply.

‘It is more than you could have expected. Was I right or not in sending you here?’

‘Right, of course.’

Shiel even returned the smile which she archly gave to him.

‘Handsel is not an ordinary individual,’ he went on, taking out a pocket-book as

he spoke. ‘I might as well give you this, Glen. You know from whom I have got it for you, and what it means.’

He held forth some bank-notes, at sight of which the girl’s eyes opened wide in amazement. She made no movement to take them, and the paper rustled in the breeze.

‘Would you rather that I gave them to Handsel?’

‘I can’t take them—sir; not from you.’

‘Do you think they are out of my own pocket?’ he asked, derisively.

‘They can come from nowhere else.’

‘I tell you that I got them from Pettipher. Just put them in your pocket, and see that Handsel is put to no expense.’

Glen could scarcely trust her senses as she closed her fingers upon this amount

of wealth, and it was no doubt mainly as a result of this that she allowed them to close also upon the hand at which she had received it. Shiel was so taken aback by her action that he did not at once resent it.

‘ You have been over-good to me, Mr. Shiel,’ exclaimed Glen, fixing her pathetic blue eyes upon him eagerly, and still holding up his hand before her. ‘ You canna think me worth a’ your trouble.’

Did Glen know how prettily this vernacular sounded on her lips? Rather let us suppose it mere emotional instinct.

‘ I don’t altogether,’ said Shiel, calmly, as he extricated that hand of his.

‘ Then why have you done it?’ she returned, archly, without lowering her eyes from him.

'I should do the same for your cat, Glen.'

Short of propounding a transcendent theory, what could he say?

She turned to beat a mock retreat, and Shiel stepped after her; when just on the path before them appeared a man in black, with an unrolled umbrella and a black, shiny bag in his hand. It was, of course, Mr. James Gilholme.

Glen ran on, but Shiel greeted the young minister with cordiality. The latter appeared anything but at ease.

'Let me say good-bye, Glen,' he cried in despair, seeming to disregard Shiel's urbanity.

'Oh, I thought I said good-bye.'

Wanless drew off.

'You need not avoid me,' said the young

man, in a tone of mingled injury and resignation. ‘ I shall not annoy you long.’

‘ Oh, James, how can you think——’

But his look and finger checked her.

‘ Anything to me, Glen, but don’t tell a falsehood. Do you think a heart can be blind, lass? I know my words have annoyed you. I hoped that things might have changed now. In parting now I must say for the last time——’

‘ Yes, I know, James. I wish you didn’t.’

‘ I must—always,’ was his impulsive reply. ‘ But good-bye, and God keep you.’

He seized her hand for an instant, and fled. Shiel would have spoken with him, but for the moment poor James was but

human, and he hurried on his way. Glen also was permitted to make her escape, and Shiel replaced his back in the crevice.

That night Mr. Wanless had his two children into the library to him ; an ideal room, by the way, within strictly modest proportions. Although a notable man in various ways, the Reverend Edgar Robertson Wanless had not succeeded in establishing for himself any general fame beyond the confines of his rugged pastorate. Doubtless he had at one time had ambition—evidenced it might be by a certain pessimistic turn of contemplation latterly apparent, as well as by some entries in the British Museum catalogue, with which his children were perfectly familiar, although no single reference to

them had ever been made in their hearing by the author of them. Under the letter W you will find this :

- ‘ WANLESS, E. R., M.A.—“The Harp of Æolus, and other Poems.” 4to. Published for the Author. 1849.
— — — “The Curlew’s Cry, and other Poems.” 12mo. Published for the Author. 1851.
— — — “A Word for Outlaws : being a collection of Country Essays.” 8vo. London. Gammon and Spinach. 1860.’

If indeed it were so, the clergyman’s aspirations must have long since contracted. He composed his own sermons, and attended visitation, but was not known now to assail the active world in any other direction. As already said, with neither of his children had he ever, even in jest, made direct reference to any of his past efforts ; especially singular,

perhaps, in face of their own well-known persistent endeavour in imaginative production. He had never encouraged or restrained them in this or in anything else, with the one exception of their strictly academical studies. There, we know, he had guided with care and efficiency. For years, when he had talked to them, he had spoken as to equals, and never slighted their opinion. If, when they were younger, any of his remarks had outstripped their juvenile and inexperienced comprehension, he was never interrogated for elucidation. They would simply withdraw on a favourable occasion, and drub it out by sheer force of their joint native intelligence.

That now, in more mature life, they

were reserved and uncommunicative towards him, caused the gentleman neither surprise nor regret. Judging by apparent action, it did not engage his thoughts, he being to all appearances as independent of the ordinary parental needs and ambitions as of the social and intellectual. Upon this one crisis in his son's existence had he, somewhat to their surprise, energetically joined issue, and of course they were both sufficiently aware of the purpose of this requested interview.

It was perhaps unfortunate that neither father nor son indulged in the mollifications of tobacco-fumes. The mere trivial diversion for the fingers would have been of use to them on such an occasion as the present, and the fragrant haze in the cham-

ber would have imparted a more human halo to the situation, and have dimmed the tragic encounter to the superlatively sensitive outlook of the reflecting Ebba.

‘I am anxious to know your determinations for the future, Shiel,’ Mr. Wanless lost no time in announcing, when the three were enclosed within the impressive walls of volumes.

‘I have none, father,’ was the brief reply.

‘Then I think it behoves us to formulate them without delay. I have proved that mere transcendental speculation does not feed a man. As your experience must confirm mine now or later, how do you propose to be fed?’

‘I have incurred no liability to the consideration as yet,’ said Shiel.

‘ I should then recommend a climb to Tam Tallon’s Crag to-morrow morning, fasting, as the most conclusive corrective to such incomprehensible philosophy, on the supposition that my table is not available thereafter.’

‘ That could in no way affect my argument——’

‘ But it might your practice.’

‘ We have never bandied words, father, and I don’t wish to begin now. I confirm *in toto* what I told you a few days ago.’

‘ But don’t you know, man, that there is such a mortal consummation as starving?’

‘ I do, and I can face it with equanimity. The responsibility will not be mine. I resolutely refuse to take any place in a

competitive existence, and at the present moment no definite remunerative existence is possible otherwise.'

'Is the mere competition, then, your bugbear?'

'It is sufficient to take as one. The breath of it makes life a sordid and grovelling fatuity, and I will not have my life so.'

'Then is all your preliminary cultivation of life to be thrown away utterly?'

'By no means. How can it ever be thrown away? Is its return to be found in the gross accumulation of debasing lucre? Do you consider it as so much material shop-keeping capital which is to justify itself by a dividend of cent per cent? That is not how I regard it. Is not the mere individual intellect trained

and intensified, its sufficient justification?’

‘In an ethereal universe undoubtedly, but I have not found this of ours in any sense ethereal. You have a stomach.’

Shiel did not answer. The vicar was agitated, trembling extremely.

‘It is your duty, Shiel,’ he continued, ‘to select some employment which will honourably sustain you, and my duty to do what is in my power to enforce it. You cannot think that I lay any claims upon you, so you cannot possibly misunderstand my action. I may be mistaken,—all human intellect is terribly liable to misconception,—but it appears to me, with overwhelming vehemence, that I should be behaving criminally towards you if I did not take action now, whilst the path is still widely open before you; whilst every-

thing in life is possible to you. Will you not modify your resolution? Will you not spare me the violence which is loathsome and unnatural to me?’

‘ My decision is unalterable,’ replied Shiel, coldly.

‘ Then I have no escape. At any cost to either of us I must take the step. You must know, Shiel,’ proceeded the clergyman, solemnly, and with tremulous effort, ‘ that after the hour of noon tomorrow my house and my resources are no longer at your service, until you have submitted to some form of regular and life-sustaining occupation.’

‘ Be it so,’ said Shiel, quietly, and an impressive silence pervaded the room after the utterance of such a critical sentence.

Ebba did not see fit to interpose a syllable. The result was logical, and this at any rate was no moment for interference. Shiel she could address at any time, and she determined to offer no impertinence to her father. His emotion was obvious, and, seeing his life-long reticence towards them, this in itself impressed her deeply. In view of his philosophy, his firmness was wholly kind. Such a nature as Shiel's could not be otherwise dealt with.

It was Shiel himself that first broke the silence.

'Then for the present, father, good-bye,' he said, and approached with hand extended.

His sister's eyes shot a single glance of approval of the delicate 'for the present.'

‘For the present, Shiel, good-bye.’

They clasped hands and the son went out. Ebba was about to follow, but her father touched her, and she turned.

‘Ebba, you understand me?’ he said, almost in a whisper.

‘Thoroughly, father,’ and, singular display beyond the formal parting at night-time, she kissed him.

As she escaped from the room, Mr. Wanless sat down in his arm-chair.

The past had not prepared Shiel for such a consummation, nevertheless he could receive it with equanimity.

‘I don’t see that it materially affects me, Abb,’ he was saying some time later, in response to the solicitude of his sister.
‘It is more than six months since I had to

avail myself of my father's resources, and my appetite is not exceptional.'

'But you will continue to write, you mean.'

'It is part of my breathing. If my exhalations are of interest to anybody they will pay me for them; if not, they can cease. But I shall certainly not blow a tin whistle to sustain them.'

'But why do you confine yourself to metaphysics?'

'I shall write what I am compelled to, and none other.'

And the rest of the night Shiel passed alone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FOLLOWING PAGE.

FEW, except the handful of the elect to whom such reprobation pertains not, forget the youthful delight of discovering an unexpectedly accredited cap for a bit of coveted moral abandonment, and by which the latter was confidently advanced to the dignity of principle in the eyes of the timorous conscience. This gratifying experience was frankly confessed by Miss Glen Aikenshaw during the first days of her sojourn

in that upland seclusion ; the result, as we know, of her cousin Handsel and Mr. Shiel Wanless's attainments in philosophy, which had been so unintentionally disclosed to her. Swiftly, however, Glen's complacency had been interrupted, by no voluntary retrogression on her own part, but by an acute bodily visitation which threatened to put a term to her experience of philosophy and practice altogether.

Although it was a day or two in developing, the doctor had no difficulty in attributing the unlooked-for illness to the unfavourable conditions of the girl's journey thither. In a delicate state of the system, wet and fatigue had laid intemperate hands upon her, and had flung her life for a day or two into the balance. However, she had recovered, and nature

had been content with the smaller sacrifice. Glen therefore proceeded duly towards convalescence.

She soon recaptured her tag of philosophy which had proved such a genuine acquisition to her, and she promptly began to mould life upon it. In no spirit now of abashed secrecy, moreover, but with reference solely to the wider, more liberal persuasion. She laughed and sang exuberantly, with her eyes bent only to some glittering horizon where the frowns and irksomenesses of an idle convention had no existence. This gave material aid to Glen's brisk recovery.

During the long silent hours of nursing, loyally and tenderly executed, Handsel too had opportunity for reflection. Had not the name of Shiel, through at least the

critical stages of the illness, been constantly thrust upon her, she must inevitably have found it very persistently in her meditations. Ever since her arrival, even in unfevered moments, Glen had made unhesitating use of it, not scrupling at aggressive innuendo when her cousin could by any possibility be embraced by it. Calm, even coldly judicial, as Handsel could be in such contact, the reference had considerably amused her. She too had read Shiel's lucubrations, and had moreover enjoyed a lifelong intimacy with him, but her deductions differed materially from those of her companion. Upon them, however, she had assumed an unprecedented reticence, which all Glen's efforts could not succeed in breaking, so that at length she too acquiesced in it.

The month of May was rapidly advancing, and everything prompted Handsel to the evacuation of her father's sheep-farm ; but until the invalid was securely strengthened, she did not permit herself any reference to the decisive movement. Glen was allowed to repose in luxurious idleness through all the sunshine of those lengthening days, lulled in delicious reverie by the unbroken silences of the surrounding hills, and regaining the incongruous thread of her restless existence from all the divine sources which seemed the very negation of it. For her did the morning sun flatter those round green mountain-tops with sovereign eye, and summon into sparkling life the clouds which had brooded through the night watches in vague uncertainty about them. For her did the

stately heron arouse himself in the summits of the silent firs and sail in airy majesty over the Hawk Knowe to his breakfast in the gilded waters of the burn. For her, too, did the curlew and the plover call in the still noonday, when the mountain grass was silent and motionless in the sun, throwing every blade its shadow, and all aspangle with the stars of tormentil and daisy. And for her again did the golden light, crimsoning near the summit, creep up the precipitous slope, when the babbling water held all the valley in the evening quietude. Everything ministered to her, and she condescendingly trifled with them, like a royal child playing chuck-farthing with rubies and pearls and emeralds.

There had been naturally much talk

between Handsel and the vicarage as to the invalid's future, but it was not until the girl herself had provoked some characteristic altercation that the subject was broached to her. It was one afternoon when Handsel returned from the fold, and found her cousin eating dainty fruit sent from the vicarage for her.

'Now, Glen, we'd better understand it all,' Handsel had said at a favourable opportunity. 'You must see that when you are strong enough you will have to do something for your living.'

'Certainly I will do something for my living, but I'll do what I like to do,' was the energetic response.

'By all means, hinny, and what will it be?'

'I'll see. What are you going to do?'

‘ I dinna ken yet.’

‘ Just enjoy yourself in London, I suppose.’

Hands^{el} made no response to this, having proved it unarguable.

‘ Why can’t I go with you to London and get something to do there ?’

‘ It wouldna do, Glen.’

‘ It would do well enough. I know a girl that got some singing there, and she has now four pounds a week for it. She’s wanted me to go. I can sing far better than she can ; she always said so herself.’

Hands^{el} was amazed, then horror-stricken, despite the freedom of her own ideas. She turned round to her cousin, took both her hands into her own, and gazed into her eyes.

‘ Glen, my little lass, what are you

thinking about? You must never get to that; promise me that, dearie.'

'What for, Handsel?' asked the other, with glistening eyes, half afraid of the unwonted solemnity.

'That life is no for you; you're not strong enough; you're too bonnie.'

'You want to gang one gate yourself, Handsel, and send other folks another,' pouted Glen.

'Think so if you will. I think everybody should gang the gate they're fit for.'

'It's what I'm fit for. It's all that I shall do.'

She tore her hands from her cousin's kind enclosure, and let her turn away without wishing to recall the touch.

Handscl said no more, and it was when she returned home to dinner the following

day that she found this scrawl awaiting her :

‘ Thank you for what you’ve done for me, but as we cannot agree I have just gone, Handsel. Now dinna fash about me, for I’ve got friends.—GLEN.’

It was not difficult to discern the tremulous excitement under which the words had been written. Handsel noted it, and put the paper in her pocket. Perhaps it did not wholly astonish her ; she knew that she could have done no more, so instantly found a philosophical acquiescence.

Glen’s unrest had in reality been brought to a climax by the absence of Shiel. She had awakened from her fever with her infatuation confirmed, and it had come as a wholly disconcerting element

in her calculation to find that Shiel had gone, and was not likely to spend much of his time henceforth at Linnbrig. Without much reason, certainly, she had conjectured otherwise. Her acquaintance with the vicarage maid had rendered the acquisition of his address a simple matter, but she had made no immediate use of it. Indeed, beyond definitely consolidating certain reflections of her own, the discovery of Shiel's whereabouts had done little but aggravate the suspicion with which she viewed Handsel's movements. Her cousin's behaviour was, of course, invariably construed by the flickering rushlight of the observer's own attenuated ethics. Shiel was in London ; Handsel evinced an extraordinary opposition to her (Glen's) going there, whilst she her-

self had openly confessed her inclination thitherwards. Was not the inference irresistible? No wonder the wily Handsel was so anxious to bind down a dangerous rival to some distant exclusive employment. But Glen was not the one to be duped.

With the above consummation, Handsel was soon able to bring her own affairs to a conclusion, and she communicated her intentions to the trusty Ebba. Now these chanced to agree very favourably with certain schemes of the young lady's own, matured about the same time.

Ebba had observed a marked change in her father's health and habits since the disagreement with his son. He had declined to discuss the matter, so that his daughter was left to obvious inference

and conjecture as to the cause of it. From her knowledge of her father, however, she attributed the major part of his disquietude to the pecuniary, rather than to the sentimental, aspect of the matter; and upon this perception she accordingly acted. She resolved to grapple very seriously with that incubus of a thousand pounds. With no great knowledge of the world, Ebba was nevertheless well aware that many artists had eked out an initial subsistence by doing publishers' illustrations; and as she knew perfectly well that she herself could draw respectably, it seemed to her that only some definite effort was required to enable her, by this unambitious means, to afford material assistance to her father in his determination to extinguish the debt. From this a

resolve to put her ideas to a practical test was at no great distance, and accordingly she one day indirectly broached the subject to her father.

‘Will you come with me to London, father?’ she had said to him, abruptly.
‘The change is needful for you.’

‘Change—for me. Nonsense, Abb, I want no change. That is only a youthful craze.’

‘I should like you to.’

‘Impossible. I—I can’t leave the parish,’ halting over the consciously lame excuse. ‘But that shall not interfere with your own wishes. You go, by all means . . . I see there are some good pictures this year.’

There was a certain alacrity about the vicar’s permission which surprised Ebba.

In rejecting her further persuasion, he even referred to the known enterprise of Handsel, and positively suggested their going together. But, did he not object on general principles to two girls taking such a journey unaccompanied? With ordinary prudence, not at all: some girls could not sit in their own doorway in safety. Mr. Wanless even relaxed so far as to talk of the girl's tactics, nay deportment in the metropolis: suggested that Handsel should spend at the vicarage the night preceding the departure.

Naturally Ebba did not know that for two whole days previously the bulk of her father's taciturnity had been devoted to the evolution of some plausible plan for securing the temporary absence of his

daughter. The young lady's lax attitude with regard to the debt which he had felt obliged to disclose to her, had inevitably imposed a rigid reticence upon him for the future, and that positive correspondence had taken place concerning it, he did not think it necessary to mention.

In examining his father's papers, Cornelius Pettipher had inevitably discovered a document which aroused in him the intensest interest. It was a policy of assurance on the life of the Reverend Edgar R. Wanless for a thousand pounds, and to it was pinned a note of hand, acknowledging an advance of the same amount to the gentleman in question. It ought to be mentioned, in justice to the deceased gentleman's generosity, that this formality

was Mr. Wanless's sole doing; the legal deposit of security having apparently satisfied certain honourable scruples in the sensitive vicar's mind with regard to gratuitous benevolences. Cornelius pondered the matter for some time, and the outcome of his meditations was a polite note to the clergyman. From Oxford one Sunday morning this missive was despatched:

‘ DEAR SIR,

‘ In investigating the affairs of the late Mr. Pettipher, I find that a policy of assurance upon your life has been deposited with him as security for the sum of a thousand pounds. As I am anxious to wind up these affairs as soon as pos-

sible, I shall be glad if you can make it convenient to repay the sum in the course of the next month.

‘ Yours truly,

‘ CORNELIUS PETTIPHER.’

What the real effect of this brief communication might be upon the inmates of Linnbrig Vicarage, the writer had scarce means of determining. All he knew was, that there came as soon as post could speed it to him from that remote locality a reply, in length briefer even than his own, in tone fully as laconical. The vicar’s quill wrote this :

‘ SIR,

‘ It is as you have specified. The

sum shall be transmitted to you in the course of a week or two.

‘Yours obediently,

‘EDGAR R. WANLESS.’

This surprised Pettipher, and his surprise was to be further intensified when, within three weeks from the date of his application, he received from the clergyman a draft for a thousand pounds, and something over for such interest as was outstanding, with a request for the return of documents to which reference had been made. Of this communication Mr. Wanless spoke to nobody, but it was on his mind when Ebba broached her plans to him.

Inevitable enthusiasm in this young

lady resulted from the prospect before her, and she managed to impart a considerable measure of it to the companion of her journey. The one night's sojourn under the roof of Mr. Wanless exercised a powerful effect upon Handsel's imagination. It was, and she felt it to be, the beginning of a wholly new phase in her existence; one which had been long regarded in a vague and speculative way, but one which, if it had never been attained, would have provoked no vilification of adverse facts. Distinctly unconventional as Handsel was, even upon the plane of her own unsophisticated station, she was so far a formalist as to be in unconscious subjection to the self-annihilating instinct of a primitive civil-

ization. Individual impulse was no law to her, save as it was trained and modified by numberless instinctive pieties, which used to be thought inherent in the human constitution, but which we have since more fully known to be but the veneer of ignorance or amiable fatuity.

Hansel was permitted to pass that evening in unqualified intimacy, if also for the most part luxurious silence, in the library with the clergyman and his daughter. Of course the room was familiar enough to her under its general aspect; but between the stately composure of casual encounter, and the unbending warmth of social familiarity, there is a radical distinction. As is more common than superficially suspected, despite this girl's primitive career the whole bent of

her mind was to a certain degree, and in the widest of senses, literary. Her coarse work had been unquestioningly acquiesced in, but it had never been to her *merely* material. She had beheld herself by the light of a strong native intelligence, and from material such as this, mere circumstances have from time to time made much.

As she read, Mr. Wanless occasionally regarded her with pronounced interest, and when once they were alone spoke.

'I question your philosophy, Handsel,' he said, composedly.

'I have none, Mr. Wanless,' was her prompt reply.

He could not restrain a laugh.

'I hope you will come back without one still.'

And he said no more of what he had intended.

When the girls had withdrawn, the clergyman sat alone there for upwards of an hour staring at his books.

CHAPTER X.

A FIRST DRAUGHT.

INDOLENCE absolute was of course no attribute of Shiel's character, however strenuously he deprecated work as a matter of general principle. So long as he had breath he would undoubtedly labour, with whatever contemptuous disregard of the commercial, merely relative, aspects of it. A consuming egoism possessed him, which obscured, nay annihilated, the glory of labour for its own sake, or even for any

exquisite product, material or artistic, which should result from it. Much of his instinct might no doubt have found utterance in the dogmatic couplet wherein a poet has seen fit to characterise the human soul,

' . . . to promote and fortify the weal
Of our own being, is her paramount end.'

Nor of this, in an individual, by any means as a duty,—for how can irresponsibility impute duty?—but as an irresistible instinct only,—an instinct which dominated his nature as that of passion or ambition dominate the more normally constructed. Responsibility for existence found no place in his individual; that could only arise from the parental enormity which gave the prime instigation to his fury.

Of human passion, as such, it is unnecessary to say that he was ignorant. Not only in his own life-long behaviour, but in all his imaginative effort, emotional and poetical as very much of it was, he had been unconscious, or latterly vigorously repudiative, of the bond of sex. This central fire, which to most imaginative intellects becomes the redeeming leaven of our being, appeared to Shiel the very acme of our woe. Nor did this spring from any prudery of conviction ; it was far more comprehensive than that. Born simply to the negative perceptions of his hour, he had found them insoluble in certain of his instincts, but active to the extent of producing a new and admittedly virulent combination. Could sexual exaltation be indulged purely for the

behoof of the individual, doubtless to Shiel it were a legitimate stimulus to endurance ; but hopelessly involved in the multiplication of souls,—suffering ones, of course, as he held them,—what right had he to the consolation ? The eremite's elder philosophy deprecated the contamination of the body ; Shiel's did not so much as see this insignificant fly in the ointment—would have pronounced it a genuine honey bee if it had. He was lost in that tragic stare on the horizon.

' If a man have not the element of hope within himself,' he had not long since written,—' if he know not the extremities of his being ; the heaven or hell from which he rises, the heaven or hell to which he sets ; with all the universe of calamity which this involves—is not the imposition

of his infidel transit upon a soul unasked
the very consummation of satanic craft?
And if this array of but as yet pathetically
accusing eyes be not appalling sanction
enough to us, are we to marvel if those
eyes shall gather frenzy and advance as
a consuming host to destroy us, their
creating demons?

For the present Shiel himself indubitably
found it so, hence sensibility to woman a
crown of steel.

To have been strictly logical, Shiel
ought no doubt to have retired, from the
inhospitable roof of his father, to some
convenient cairn upon the open hills, and
have there awaited an inevitable dissolution,
bequeathing his remains to any materialist
crows, and the responsibility of his death
to the immediate author of his being. But

his intellectual vehemence saved him from this. Sincere enough he was in his resolve not to work for money, but the repudiation of his intellect was altogether beyond him. Doubtless he saw nothing of the inconsistency.

The rupture with his father stimulated this impulse inordinately. Within three days from his dismissal from Linnbrig, he sent a London address to his sister, announcing it his permanent one, and then followed a silence.

In practical life he was taking no part. He had no friends,—no humanizing dissipations. He had simply plunged into a period of furious intellectual activity. He read, he wrote;—he flitted with ruffled brow through long corridors of galleries and museums, inevitably exciting attention

in the intelligent curious. He *looked* alone,—aggressively, inhumanly, solitary. He was drinking of the worldly pageant without touching the goblet, and he grinned at the bitterness of it.

But not grinning only ; he could speak effectually of its flavour, and he did so with accustomed impetuosity. He could pour anything whatsoever into his alembic, and it was distilled into an individual production. If at one moment he could arouse enthusiasm by a piquant plea for the destiny of woman, he could at another impose upon readers of reputation an estimate of such familiar possessions as Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth : criticise, *suo more*, members of the British Parliament as easily as those of the Academy or Dutch school ; and all with

that curious subtlety of didacticism which appeared the very antithesis of preaching. A propagandist was the arch-fiend of his theology, and association its inferno.

It was inevitable that such an apparition should soon excite attention in the sagacious. More than one invitation Shiel very speedily received, but, now, they were as systematically disposed of. The momentary spark which Mr. Pettipher had kindled, had by the circumstances succeeding been wholly extinguished, and Shiel resented the recollection. Revolt was doubly strong in him. Needless to say, no offer disturbed him from Mr. Pettipher's successor in the proprietary of the *Herald*. Mr. Cornelius was the eldest son of his father, and now exercised some sway in Fleet Street.

‘ Of course, you will rule undividedly for the present, Mr. Furbisher,’ that young gentleman had said in his first interview with his editor succeeding his father’s death. ‘ I shall be up permanently about midsummer, and shall have a spell of all round work in the office; but I have no designs upon the chair. For a year or two I’m nuts on Russia, and shall frequently be looking up our men out there. Of course we shall look to your stipend account, but otherwise you’re firm?’

‘ Entirely so. I see a vast future in front of us, and my only desire is to brandish in its service.’

‘ Good. I could never move my father on the “Evening” question, but I am intent upon it. Wait until I come up.’

Cornelius was not so inexperienced as

might be thought proper to an undergraduate, but this was the result of his training. On this point his father had had theories, and from the successes of his public school the son had been sent to spend four years in the political capitals of two hemispheres, returning from that to his curriculum at the university. Cornelius therefore was by no means a chicken, although a month or two still from the class lists.

‘ Did Mr. Pettipher speak to you of his designs upon literature and literary matters, and of things progressive ? Latterly he talked of a man called Wanless in this connection, who has had a trenchant paper or two in some of the American monthlies. He writes well : you know him ? ’

Cornelius laughed.

‘ He has just left my college. Did my father seriously think of him ? ’

‘ Quite so, and I must say I seconded him. The man has some virgin vigour which is worth——’

‘ Any quantity, and uncommonly virgin; but, my dear fellow, personally he is a rank lunatic. A man of considerable ability on certain lines, but he can turn a corner about as sharply as a crocodile. Better put an infernal machine in your cellar.’

‘ Ha, ha ! If you personally know the man, that settles it.’

Perhaps Shiel began really to perceive the impracticable limits which Ebba had pointed out to him, and exultantly fostered them under this mantle of rebellion. Such a perception could not be other than a

source of satisfaction to him under any circumstances, for he had long vaunted in every conscious contrast between his temperament and that of the outer world. At any rate, he never again harboured even the lightest thought of attaching himself to any definite literary establishment. He found his hands sufficiently full by merely writing what clamoured in his mind for impetuous utterance, and for whatever he thought good to submit to a wider arbitration, editors shewed a remarkable partiality.

He had chosen his lodgings in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park, in order that he might have at least grass to stride upon when he needed, and many was the sunset he would witness from the neighbouring height of Primrose Hill, despite his persistent return in a mood of cynical

raillery at the surroundings. It always aroused a savage struggle within him ; for one set of things drew him vehemently towards the imaginative quiescence of the wilderness of his nativity, whilst another warned him of the intellectual sedition which there would inevitably assail him and no doubt put him once more to flight.

One glorious evening in May,—it was the last of the month,—he had witnessed such a sunset; a spectacle fraught with primordial appeal to such as chanced to be at the moment favourable to its reception. It had impressed Shiel inordinately, for him at least it had caught at a moment of exceptional emotion. He had come from a day of exhausting toil,—for habitually every line he wrote was dipped in the blood of him, and that day he had been

dipping long and vehemently. His theme had been ‘The Comic Muse,’—a characteristic reverie inspired by the contemplation of a print of the Thalia statue in the Vatican,—and it had led him into deepest issues. He began in a comparatively jocular spirit, trifling airily with popular needs ; but he had ere long drifted on to the inevitably tragic vein. He confronted the essential thought of balm for the o'er-wrought soul—recreation and forgetfulness for the suffering consciousness,—and of course instinctively the ray was forthwith turned upon himself. Wholly novel in his experience, a bit of conscious *analysis* had resulted. With grim decision he unearthed the soul to which all relaxation is rigorously prohibited, and flung it out into the open there ; revealing as discovering

all its shredded ligaments, its abnormal accretions here, its nerveless members there; and he immediately saw it for his own. But, singular confession, for the first time in his history he gloried not in it. Intellectual impulse had hitherto been his law, an essential reality, a natural truth; but when he now discovered that it was worked by springs peculiar to the individual the whole illusion was altered, and he drew back at pause.

In this unfamiliar frame of mind Shiel had issued forth, and he was still further perplexed to find the world transformed about him. Instead of notes of woe, peals of genuine laughter floated on the breeze. He passed a gin-shop at the corner, and rude mirth assailed him. On the grass, children tumbled gleefully in the last sun's

rays, and the bats of their elders resounded far and wide, mingling with hilarious voices. In the shade were gliding ecstatic couples, needing no noise. He watched it all, and his bewilderment deepened ; then he went on to mount the hill. Here the scene but repeated itself,—wild abandonment of glee on every hand. If it were moody madness only, it was an enviable form. Everybody could laugh but he. He with his vaunted intellectual superiority knew no unbending ; seemed never to have known it.

Shiel stood long upon the summit, gazing at the glorious sky. Bars of gold and amethyst stretched across that dazzling unknown sea, and drew him on to flights to which he was wholly a stranger. He had gazed on many such before, had drawn

from them a certain impulsive inspiration ; but never with the recognition that they took their sober suggestion and colouring from *his* eye. The discovery was a vital one, and it shook him to the foundation. When ‘essential truth,’ ‘universal edict,’ give place to the less exalted admission of ‘spectacles,’ definite modification may be looked for; but to what extent, of course, depends upon a number of other constitutional forces. At length Shiel turned away, and slunk homewards in the twilight.

As he was thrusting his latch-key in the door, he heard somebody step up lightly beside him, and, turning, recognised features in the lamplight, and heard familiar accents mutter his name. He stood back surprised.

‘ May I speak to you ? ’

He only answered by turning abruptly from the door and walking to the pavement, making at the same time a signal to his visitor to accompany him.

‘ What brings you here ? ’ he asked, in an impulsive undertone.

‘ I want to ask you if you will come and hear me sing.’

‘ Hear you sing ? What on earth do you mean ? Explain yourself.’

‘ I have only had lessons for about a week, but a friend of mine has fallen ill, and I am going to take her place for two nights at the Star Music Hall, in — Street.’

The tremulous excitement with which this important announcement was made was obvious enough on the narrator’s

tongue, but it only served to heighten Shiel's astonishment.

'But I want to know how you have got here. I left you in the wilds of Northumberland in a—'

'Oh, I have done with all that,' interposed the girl vivaciously, screened by the darkness. 'I am going to be a singer, and get my own living, and be one of that band of women that you wrote about.'

So incongruous was the suggestion that Shiel was at a genuine loss to perceive the reference. Glen explained herself further, taking care to adopt as many of his words and as much of what she deemed the spirit of his utterance as remained with her. Shiel *could* now have laughed, but not quite in the manner that he had recently contemplated. So he refrained from it.

‘Won’t you come to hear me?’ she asked, misinterpreting his silence.

‘Certainly, with pleasure.’

‘Then I can sing my best,’ she cried, and brought her little gloved palms sharply together.

Shiel retreated to his doorway, and, when Glen had seen it close behind him, she too went on her way.

This encounter offered a somewhat ludicrous comment upon Shiel’s previous subject of contemplation, and in that light only did he feel able to regard it. The various aspects of it which, but a day ago, would inevitably have been presented were all hidden from him now, and only as it touched that universal abandonment to mirth, that cardinal deficiency of his own, could it offer appeal.

This consciousness of the subjectivity of his soul once attained—this birth of the critical faculty once definitely suspected—the internal warfare in the intellect of Shiel had fairly begun. When he had lighted his lamp, and lay prostrate in his arm-chair, he gazed for some time, in a state of twilight reverie, at the manuscript sheets which lay scattered around him, and from which he had so precipitately fled. Then he gathered sheet by sheet and read them, and the tremors of his soul were re-awakened. So obviously did he see this effusion to be but a reflex of himself, rather than one of the eternal voices, that impatiently he seized the matches, and, lighting page after page at the corner, allowed the ashes to fall crackling into the coal-box. By this single ray

how much was revealed to him ! He saw how all his recent activity had been nothing but the unconscious struggling of his own soul to attain to another atmosphere ; to shatter, when deemed firmest welded, the bonds which so rigorously restrained him. By virtue of his own blindness, had he been vehemently proving the non-existence of the sun.

Of course, as yet it was but a perception, in supreme ignorance of much that it meant to him. His only discovery was that his soul knew no manner of relaxation, nor had to his recollection known it. What was his savage isolation but an inability to partake of the diversions of humanity ? an intolerable impatience at the display of them ? Why was he alone debarred ? If the barrier could be broken,

might not high flights await him? mighty deliverances? . . .

It is hardly likely that his late feverish period could, even upon physical grounds, have been indefinitely prolonged. His bodily prostration upon this particular evening, when the sustaining impulse had been momentarily removed, astonished him, and added another element to the novel speculation. He tried to read, but everything turned to sand upon his palate. He went out again, with the intention of instituting an immediate search for the missing intellectual commodity in quarters to which he had been determinedly a stranger; but, ere he reached the corner of his own street, he turned back, and ultimately found his refuge on the pillow.

The next morning mere habit brought

him to his table, resolved to try his pen upon a lighter theme; but, unknown experience for him, he felt complete inability to concentrate his forces, and he flung all from him in impatience. The day he spent in wandering aimlessly about the town.

Towards evening his mind returned with curiosity to his engagement. He looked to it with determined eagerness, if perchance it might afford him some more definite clue to the maze in which he found himself. As the day was closing accordingly he strode off to the music-hall which had been named to him, with a grim resoluteness stamped upon his features. As he traversed the pavement of Trafalgar Square, the lamps alight, he stopped as suddenly as though a thunderbolt had checked him. A moment's stare at two

young women who were talking audibly there, and he planted his hand firmly upon the shoulder of one of them. She started and faced him, revealing as she did so the features of his sister Ebba. A revulsion of feeling swept over Shiel, and he said something joyfully.

‘ You have spoilt all, Shiel,’ exclaimed she in return, and he turned swiftly away.

A few more words, and they parted.

Ebba chanced to have been in a transcendent glow of incipient independence, hence her repellent front to him.

In the midst of the glare, the heat, and the joviality Shiel sat, a noticeable figure amongst the crew assembled there. He strove to examine his neighbours calmly and sympathetically, to express from them,

if he could, the secret which was withheld so stringently from himself. The vulgarity of everything at first overwhelmed him, but this he knew to be the inevitable first skirmish of his struggle. He had never drawn elaborate distinctions ; all popular diversions had been vulgar to him. He knew that the calibre of the present assembly caused him at least less irritation than would that of a more select company, and in his present phase he considered that the principle of which he was in search would be as accurately exemplified here as amongst the admirers of the most exalted drama. All knew equally how to ignore the burden of a universe, for at least an hour or two, and the how of that was his present absorbing inquiry. The more likelihood, indeed, of its being

nakedly exposed to him in the more vulgarly natural assembly.

He succeeded in extracting but little from his hilarious companions. That genuine abandonment did beam on every countenance, he could not but immediately recognise; but he was as far as ever from discovering the requisite clock-work. He was glad therefore when the small glittering constellation in which was his main interest appeared upon its orbit, and he resolved to concentrate his observation upon this alone. The mere brilliancy of her at first inevitably astounded him; the exhilarating novelty of the experience stimulating all that was most fascinating in Glen's sprightly characteristics. Her eyes swept the wilderness of faces, and soon by sheer emphasis of contrast found

the point she was in search of. Their glances consciously encountered, and she flung off in wildest exuberance.

Shiel now found his struggles severe, and only savage determination kept him to his place. The entertainment was by no means of the coarsest, but to him, in view of elementary perceptions, it was pandemonium enough. The vociferous applause which constantly resounded rang as the hilarity of the damned ; and the womanhood—yes, womanhood of Glen was the price of their abandoned orgies. Never before had he recognised any exclusive delicacy in womanhood, but at this moment it was thrust on him. The fairy charms of the singer rose in rebellious warfare against the degradation of its bonds, and the crisis was not to be re-

sisted. As Glen's second song came to an end, Shiel rose impetuously from his seat, and struggled to the door. Just as he had passed it he paused to wipe his brow, and immediately he felt his arm caught tremulously from behind.

‘Are you going?’

There was the fairy, in all the fascinations of the footlights; the flushed face raised appealingly to him.

‘I am,’ responded Shiel. ‘Good-night.’

‘But I have done,’ she quickly responded. ‘Let me go with you. I shall be annoyed here. You will stay just a minute.’

‘Then be quick.’

Shiel had not progressed so far as in the least to regret this. Nay, it would be a momentary deliverance to see her securely removed from it. He did not in

the least know why she should appear as an incongruity in its midst. Consciously, an exalted moralist he had never been; nor had his impulses ever found their source in a moral motive. They did not do so now, for they had nothing whatever definite about them.

‘You think it low,’ said Glen, when they had escaped from the premises and were striding through the streets.

‘I think it diabolical.’

‘I shall soon get to a better place: but everybody has to make a beginning.’

Glen was genuinely distressed at the reception, for she had felt the completeness of her triumph.

‘Yes, it *is* a beginning,’ growled Shiel.

‘They enjoy it,’ pleaded Glen.

‘Do you?’

‘ Certainly I do. I mean no harm by it. I am free, and get my own living by it.’

Shiel stopped and stared at her.

‘ You enjoy it?’ he again demanded, dwelling upon the obnoxious word.

She repeated her assurance firmly.

‘ I went there to see if I could,’ pursued Shiel, more composedly. ‘ I have found out that I can enjoy nothing.’

‘ I have never seen you laugh,’ Glen said, with alacrity, struck by his altered tone.

‘ Can you teach me? To-night you have not done it.’

Shiel spoke in grim earnestness enough, for with the removal of the actual display which had so exasperated him his genuine purpose recurred. There was nevertheless bitter sarcasm on his tongue.

'I will try,' said Glen.

'Can you sing anything else but that?'

'Plenty.'

No doubt if Shiel could have been apprised of the furious beating of the little heart beside him, he would have there and then relinquished his pursuit of mirth through this particular channel at least. Without sensibility to female light in himself, he had evolved extraordinary sexual theories, solidified by the revolt against the perpetuation of his kind of which he had made no secret; and these left his hands exceptionally free. His only error lay in extending this satisfactory freedom to the general constitution of the race. Glen knew neither fear nor theory: all she recognised was an ardent inclination to this insensible

theorist, and inclinations she invariably followed.

‘Will you sing to me, then?’

‘That I will any time. But—but where?’

‘Yes, where,’ mused Shiel, checked for the moment. ‘Have you a piano?’

‘We have at our rooms. I lodge with a friend of mine.’

Shiel mused again, not adopting the obvious inference.

‘Why, we’ll go and see Handsel,’ he at length remarked.

Glen was shot.

‘Has she come?’ was all she could articulate.

Without observing the tone of her inquiry, Shiel went on to particularize his suggestion; more as a species of soliloquy than a definite communication to his com-

panion. But Glen's enthusiasm was damped for the night.

'I will see them and let you know.
What is your address?'

She gave it him,—a street not far from his own locality. At a favourable point Shiel hailed a 'bus, and he saw the new singer safely to her door.

'Handsel will never let me sing to you,' said Glen, as he bade her good-night.

'We'll see about that.'

As he walked to his own lodgings he wondered what she meant.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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